The Effect of Mother’s Ethnicity and Their Fetal Attachment’s Effect on Cortisol Level’s Pregnancy

It has been found that high levels of cortisol lead to a variety of negative health outcomes such as cardiovascular disease, especially in ethnic minority women during pregnancy and this may in turn affect their baby’s health causing complications such as, premature birth and developmental delays. Previous studies have examined how mother’s cortisol levels and fetal attachment affects their baby’s health outcomes, but not many have looked at how these variables may be affected by the mother’s ethnicity and how this relates to their health outcomes. However, few studies have examined the relationship between mother’s ethnicity and their cortisol (AUC, the total amount of cortisol exposure over the course of a day) moderated by their level of maternal fetal attachment (MFA, women’s interaction with their unborn child) to their baby. Elevated cortisol and lower levels of maternal fetal attachment can provoke higher stress levels which may heighten the risk of birth complications. The current study examined whether Latina mothers (71%) would have lower levels of cortisol when compared to non-Latina mothers (18% African American, 4% Asian-American, 4% Non-Hispanic White, 3% Mixed Ethnicity) and whether their cortisol levels are influenced by their maternal fetal attachment. Our sample included low-income mothers (N = 87) who completed assessments regarding demographics and maternal fetal attachment at the third trimester. Additionally, women provided seven saliva samples in one day to assess for cortisol levels. A regression analysis indicated that there was a significant interaction between ethnicity and maternal fetal attachment on cortisol, such that non-Latina mothers who reported higher levels of attachment with their fetus had lower cortisol levels (b = 0.074, t(83)= -2.441, p= 0.017). Results may be due to different perspectives and experiences of maternal stressors that affect maternal fetal attachment in Latina mothers. These findings support the idea that health behavior interventions can improve minority mother’s well-being by lowering their AUC levels and increasing maternal fetal attachment with their baby. This also highlights the need for Latina mothers to take early prevention measures in order reduce stress during pregnancy.