

Rumination affects mother–infant interactions

Rumination — or focused attention on the symptoms of one’s distress — is associated with the onset and maintenance of

depression, but whether it affects the quality of interaction between an infant and a mother affected by postnatal depression is unclear. New research now shows that a ruminative state can affect the quality of sensitive maternal behaviours. A total of 79 mothers, of whom half exhibited depressive-like symptoms (dysphoria), were randomly assigned to a “rumination induction” or control group. The rumination induction group were asked to identify unresolved, self-relevant problems and the control group were asked to identify resolved, self-relevant problems. Each group focused on these problems for 10 minutes, and mother–infant interactions were analyzed. Dysphoric mothers showed reduced quality of interaction with their infants compared to the non dysphoric controls, and mothers in the rumination induction group exhibited reduced sensitivity towards their infants compared to those in the control group. The researchers conclude

that a ruminative state impairs the quality of mother–infant interaction, regardless of the initial level of depressive symptoms the mother is experiencing.

Tester-Jones, M., Karl, A., Watkins, E. & O’Mahen, H. (2017), Rumination in dysphoric mothers negatively affects mother–infant interactions. J Child Psychol Psychiatr. 58: 38-45. doi:10.1111/jcpp.12633