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Søren Ventegodt, Mohammed Morad, Isack Kandel and Joav Merrick (30 July 2004)

Maternal smoking and quality of life more than thirty years later

30 July
2004



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 Ventegodt, et al.

EDITOR---This communication in response to the recent paper on passive smokers during childhood and long term work disability (1) and the comments in the BMJ (2), where the focus was on the increased risk for back pain later in life. This study (1) was conducted in Oslo with 4,744 nurse aides exposed to environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) and followed for 15 months. The aides exposed to ETS were more likely to have neck pain, high back pain, lower back pain and more like to take sick leave exceeding eight weeks. We have looked at long term effects (more than 30 years) of maternal smoking on later quality of life of children exposed in uterine life (3).

OUR STUDIES

The Copenhagen Perinatal Birth Cohort 1959-61 is a prospective longitudinal perinatal study that included all deliveries (over 20 weeks gestation, birthweight over 250g) that took place at the

University Hospital (Rigshospitalet) in Copenhagen, Denmark during the period of September 21, 1959 to December 21, 1961 and used in our follow-up study to investigate the connection between maternal smoking during pregnancy and the quality of life of the child 31-33 years later.

The latest follow-up study from the cohort was performed in 1993 and 7,222 of the surviving children were identified (now aged between 31-33 years). They were contacted with a non-anonymous questionnaire on several aspects of quality of life issues.

There were 4,626 usable responses ($f = 2,489$, $m = 2,131$) corresponding to a response rate of 64.1%. The children whose mothers were non-smokers or smoked less than three cigarettes a day had a quality of life that was 2.7% better than those children where mothers had smoked over ten cigarettes per day. At first glance these figures seemed small, however, when compared with other early life factors we saw that mothers smoking more than ten cigarettes a day was one of the most important early predictors in our study for the quality of life (QOL) of the child as adult. As most people in our study have a QOL rating between 55% and 85%, 2.7% is about 10% of normal variation.

COMMENTS

The author in the Norwegian study (1) believed that smoke could have effects on the developing spine, which together with other studies makes the suspicion that smoke long term could effect spinal pain. It seemed from our study (3) that exposure to tobacco smoke during pregnancy had a small, but significant effect on the quality of life in later adult life. However the underlying causal factor for this reduction in quality of life remains unclear. Nevertheless, pregnant mothers should be made aware of the potential long-term effects smoking can have on their child. Further studies are needed to find the exact damage.

AFFILIATION

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