



Crying babies, tired mothers: hurdles to early family health?

Background: Soothing a crying baby, while coping with exhaustion, is a significant struggle for many new parents. Yet, routine postnatal care lacks effective strategies to alleviate these challenges which can adversely affect family health.

Objectives: The aim of this study was to explore risk factors, evolution, and interaction of postnatal infant crying and maternal tiredness.

Design: A mixed methods approach combined a case control study to examine risk factors for emerging crying problems and a qualitative study to explore mothers' views and practices.

Settings: Postnatal hospital care and follow-up home care in Switzerland

Participants: *Case control study:* 5452 mother-child pairs in postnatal homecare (n= 1112 cases of emerging crying problems, n= 4340 controls). *Longitudinal qualitative study:* purposeful sample of 15 mother-child pairs with singleton, healthy neonates

Methods: The case control study was analysed using a multivariate regression model. The qualitative method employed interpretative phenomenology to analyze interview and observation data collected at 1, 6 and 12 weeks postpartum.

Findings: Higher parity was protective for the occurrence of crying problems (2nd child: OR 0.52, ≥ 3 children: OR 0.41), whereas vacuum/forceps deliveries (OR 1.72) and maternal depression in the early postpartum (OR 1.62) were the most significant risk factors. Qualitative findings depict how mothers either gain expertise to cope with infant crying and tiredness or how they lose confidence to overcome this challenge.

Conclusions: To strengthen family health from the earliest stage, postnatal care needs new strategies alleviating the burden of infant crying and maternal tiredness, especially for inexperienced first-time mothers.

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