

Title

Predictors of mothers' self-identified challenges in parenting infants: Insights from a large, nationally diverse cohort

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Running Head: Mothers' challenges in parenting infants

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Abstract

Being a parent of an infant is full of challenges, yet little is known about how child, mother, family, or socio-contextual factors relate to mothers' self-identified challenges. Mothers of infants from a large (N= 6383) representative longitudinal sample of New Zealand children and their families were asked to report their biggest challenge over the first nine months of their infant's life. Thematic analysis was used to identify five main maternal parenting challenges: 'Challenges fulfilling maternal role and responsibility'; 'Time management/work issues'; 'Sleep deprivation'; 'Personal change and adjustment' and 'Attributes of the child'. Using binomial logistic regression analyses, a range of child, maternal, family and contextual factors related to the reporting of the challenges were identified. The strongest predictors of maternal challenges were parity, which predicted four of the five main challenges, and ethnicity, which predicted three challenges. Health and development of the child was found to be associated with two of the five challenges, while maternal age, child's negative affect, parenting confidence, parenting satisfaction, mother being in paid employment and gender of the child were each associated with one challenge. Our findings about the factors that may lead mothers of infants to be more likely to experience particular challenges are informative not only for health professionals working alongside mothers and their infants, but can potentially support the development of policies that enhance the well-being of New Zealand families.

Keywords: Mothers, Challenges, Infants, Maternal role, Parity

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