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Interactions Between Maternal Characteristics and Neonatal Behavior in the Prediction of Parenting Stress and Perception of Infant Temperament

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Background Prenatal cocaine exposure is a marker of developmental risk. Social environmental risk factors may include maternal stress and maternal perceptions of difficult infant temperament. **Objectives** To examine factors that may predict or moderate maternal ratings of parenting stress and difficult temperament in cocaine-exposed (CE) infants. **Method** Neonatal behavior, infant temperament, parenting stress, and maternal psychopathology were measured in a large sample of infant–mother dyads with prenatal CE and a nonexposed comparison sample. Participants were drawn from an existing longitudinal data set (Maternal Lifestyle Study). **Result** Relations between neonatal behavior and infant temperament ratings were moderated by mothers' ratings of parenting stress. Relations between neonatal cry and parenting stress were moderated by maternal psychopathology ratings. Results were unrelated to drug exposure history. **Conclusions** For mothers of at risk infants (with or without prenatal CE), psychological distress affects the degree to which infant behavioral characteristics are experienced as stressful or difficult. Implications for treatment and outcome are discussed.

Key words: cocaine; parenting stress; temperament.

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