Development of Trait Emotional Intelligence in response to Childbirth: A Longitudinal Couple Perspective

Galdiolo, S. (UMONS)
Gaugue, J. (UMONS)
Mikolajczak, M. (UCLouvain)
Van Cappellen, P. (Duke University)

Trait Emotional Intelligence (EI)

- People with high trait EI (Petrides & Furnham, 2003)
  - Identify their own and others’ emotions
  - Express emotions in socially acceptable manners
  - Understand their causes and consequences
  - Regulate them when they are inappropriate in a given context
  - Use emotions to improve their social relationships

→ Well-being, health, & relationships
Trait EI development

- Trait EI = subject to change (Pérez-Gonzalez et al., in preparation)
  - + 12% in self-reports
  - + 6.6% in reports by spouses/friends

Life events & trait EI development
Childbirth & Trait EI development

*Social Structural Theory* (Eagly & Wood, 1999)
*Social Investment Principle* (Roberts et al., 2005)

- Life event: Childbirth
- New social roles: Parent
- Psychological changes:
  - Prosocial behavior
  - Emotional stability

→ Ho: Childbirth → Higher levels of EI
Childbirth & Trait EI development: Two levels of influence

• Couple’s level

• Gender roles’ level

→ Between-couples changes Ho

→ Within-couples changes Ho

Childbirth & Trait EI development: Primiparous vs. Multiparous parents?

Transition to parenthood Ho

New baby Ho
Methods

Sample & Procedure

204 parental couples
143 primiparous & 60 multiparous couples

Pregnancy
(M = 23.67 pregnancy weeks, SD = 8.49)

6 months
(M = 25.03 weeks postpartum, SD = 4.81)

1 year
(M = 12.76 months, SD = 1.66)

Exclusion criteria
Postpartum depression
(BDI-13, Beck, Steer, & Garbin, 1988)
Life events inventory

Trait EI
(Trait EI Questionnaire; Petrides, 2009)
Method (2)

Time 1
TEIQue

215 cohabiting non-parents

Time 2
(T1 + 6 months)
TEIQue

Life – events inventory

Trait EI
(Trait EI Questionnaire; Petrides, 2009)

Measure: TEIQue

• Well-Being
  • « I feel that I have a number of good qualities »

• Self-Control
  • « On the whole, I’m able to deal with stress »

• Emotionality
  • « Expressing my emotions with words is not a problem for me. »

• Sociability
  • « I often find it difficult to stand up for my rights » (R)
Results

Parents: Actor – Partner Interdependence Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Global EI</th>
<th>Self-control</th>
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<th>Emotionality</th>
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*EI: Emotional Intelligence. Parental group as coded: 1 = Multisexual and 2 = Companions parents. Gender as coded: 1 = Mother and 2 = Father.

N = 408. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01. Child: women, child: women, Child: man, child: man.
Parents’ APIM: Intraindividual development of EI over time

Stability of EI factors around childbirth, except for Self-Control that slightly increased

Developmental trajectories of parents vs. nonparents

Parents’ baseline > Nonparents:

- Global EI \([F(1, 619) = 6.42, p = 0.01]\)
- Self-Control \([F(1, 619) = 11.20, p < 0.001]\)
- Wellbeing \([F(1, 619) = 4.57, p = 0.03]\)

Selection effect?
Developmental trajectories of parents vs. nonparents

Slight increases for parents over time only for:

- **Global EI** $[F(1, 616) = 8.23, p < 0.001]$
- **Self-Control** $[F(1, 616) = 17.08, p < 0.001]$

Parents’ APIM: Transition to parenthood Ho (Primiparous) vs. New Baby Ho (Multiparous)

**Table 3:** APIM results: coefficients of the intercepts, linear changes (slope), and predictions of parents’ CI change, i.e., (a) between-dyads variable (parental group), (b) within-dyads variable (gender), and (c) mixed variable (parents’ level of EI and age).

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<tr>
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All: Emotional Intelligence; Parental group: Primiparous = 1, multiparous = 2; Gender: father = 1, mother = 2; N = 408; $p < 0.05$, $p < 0.01$, CI = 95% confidence interval; CI = 95% confidence interval.

→ Same developmental trajectory around childbirth for primiparous and multiparous parents
Parents’ APIM: Within-couples changes

Ho

Parents’ APIM: Within-couples changes Ho

Parents’ gender: Baseline level differences

**Self-Control**

- « On the whole, I’m able to deal with stress »
- **Fathers** > **Mothers**
- $F(1, 403) = 36.02, p < 0.001$

**Emotionality**

- « Expressing my emotions with words is not a problem for me »
- **Mothers** > **Fathers**
- $F(1, 403) = 17.04, p < 0.001$
Parents’ APIM: Between-couples changes Ho

TABLE 3 | APIM results: coefficients of the intercepts, linear changes (slope), and predictions of parents’ EI change, i.e., (a) between-dyad variable (parental group), (b) within-dyad variable (gender), and (c) mixed variables (partner's level of EI and age).

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EI: Emotional Intelligence; Parental group as coded in: -1 = multipartner and 1 = primiparous parents; Gender as coded in: -1 = father and 1 = mother.
N = 886; *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01. Child, woman, Childless woman, Child, man, Childless man.

→ Negative association between EI development of the actor in a parental couple and his or her partner’s EI development

Discussion
Stability of EI around childbirth

- Anticipatory changes (before childbirth)
- Development of new social roles during pregnancy

Increase in parents’ Self-Control

- Child’s crying + Lack of sleep + All life changes
  - → strain parents’ regulatory abilities
  - → Self-Control improvement
Childbirth & Trait EI development: Primiparous vs. Multiparous parents?

Transition to parenthood Ho

New baby Ho

Weak within-couples changes

Except for Emotionality
Between-couples changes

- Dyadic developmental trajectory of EI
- Compensatory effects

Galdiolo, S. (UMONS)
Sarah.galdiolo@umons.ac.be


THANK YOU !!