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The role of the father in the caregiving process: Parental sense of competence, paternal stress and skin-to-skin contact

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New terms emerge in recent research such as the kangaroo father care, in order to demonstrate the necessity of paternal presence in a neonatal intensive care unit. In particular, skin-to-skin contact facilitates fathers in their attainment of paternal role and implicates them more in developing skills in the caregiving process but also improves their parental sense of competence. The aim of this study is to explore the construction of the first bond by means of the skin-to-skin contact between father and infant, their sense of paternal competence as well as the stress levels during the hospitalization in a NICU. Forty-eight (48) French fathers of premature infants were interviewed, taken place in the University Hospital of Toulouse. Mixed methods were used; a semi-structured interview and two questionnaires: PSS-NICU and PSOC. Main findings show that the construction of the first bond is due to skin-to-skin contact. On one hand, it may provoke more stress to fathers but, on the other hand, it is going to involve them more as a caregiver and reinforce the paternal sense of competence. Fathers experience mixed emotions with a prevalence of the stressful aspect of prematurity. The principal sources are sights and sounds and role alteration. Fathers included in our sample have a lower level of parental competence than fathers of the general population. In conclusion, fathers play a crucial role in the caregiving process. Also, future practice is proposed.

Biography

Flora Koliouli is a Psychologist, received her PhD from the University Toulouse II-Jean Jaures, France. She is a temporary Lecturer and Research Assistant in the Developmental Psychology, Department of the University of Toulouse II-Jean Jaures/ESPE. She has published 4 papers and is participating in the first national interdisciplinary project on infants and toddlers growing up in different contexts (BECO).

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