MATERNAL STRESS AND BIRTH

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Aim: In this study we investigated, if there were any differences in stress management between mothers of preterm babies and mothers of term babies.

Methods: In the first three days after delivery, mothers of preterm babies (born between 28 and 33 weeks of gestation) and mothers of term babies (born >37 weeks of gestation) were given the stress management questionnaire SVF 120 (Janke, Erdmann, Kallus und Boucsein, 1997) to assess their individual stress management strategies. This questionnaire is designed to recognise positive and negative strategies of stress management, to assess mothers' desire for social support, avoidance of stress and also aggressive behaviour in stressful situations.

Results: So far we have recruited 23 mothers (age: 29.9±5.1 years) of preterm babies (gestational age: 32.6±2.8 days; birth weight: 1911±558g) and 23 mothers (age: 30.2±5.1 years) of term babies (gestational age: 40.1±0.9 days; birth weight: 3464±347g) to participate in the study. Mothers of preterm babies had significantly lower levels of aggressive behaviour and of negative stress management strategies (avoidance, social withdrawal, resignation, self pity and self blame) ($p < 0.05$) in stressful situations in comparison to mothers of term babies. There was no difference between the two groups in regards to positive strategies, desire for social support and avoidance behaviour.

Conclusion: This is the first study to show that there is a difference in stress management between mothers of preterm and term babies. This is important information when dealing with and considering support for mothers of term and preterm babies.