Baby Carrying and Maternal Mental Health

Carmelle Swaby
June 2016
Dr. Efi Stolarski

Introduction
- Infant carrying in soft carriers and slings has been found to benefit healthy breastfeeding habits, reduce crying and protect from over-stimulation (Blois, 2007).
- One study showed that low-income mothers in the United States who were randomly assigned to carry their infants upright in soft carriers enjoyed greater bonding and attachment than a control group (Anisfeld, 1990).
- While in a baby carrier, babies are in the ideal conditions for their development: comforted by the proximity to their primary caregiver, receiving vital proprioceptive and vestibular stimulation, and cognitively stimulated by observing their mother's activities.
- Baby “wearing” grants mothers the freedom to use their hands to meet their own needs—eating, doing chores, socializing, etc.—while their baby is awake and satisfied. This enables them to rest when their baby sleeps for a long stretch.
- The use of baby carriers may facilitate the circumvention of the common parenting dilemma: having to decide whether to meet one's own needs or the needs of the infant.

Hypothesis
We hypothesize that mothers who carry their babies in slings will experience less Post-Partum Depression, improved perceptions of parental self-efficacy and enjoyment of parenting, and greater maternal sensitivity than mothers who do not have this tool.

Method:
We will recruit 25 Israeli mothers with children aged 4-8 months who use baby carriers regularly through local Baby-Wearing instructors. Each will be asked to recommend a friend to participate in the study who does not use a carrier so that we will have a comparison group of 25 women.

List of Measures:
- Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9)
- Parenting Sense of Competence
- Maternal Postpartum Attachment Scale
- Maternal Behavior Q-Sort (MBQS)

Strengths:
- First study in Israel in this growing field
- Provides insight into previous research linking carriers and attachment

Limitations:
- Correlational study, not able to imply directionality
- Small sample, not representative of population
- Important to carefully avoid researcher bias