

Unlocking the potential of prenatal attachment

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A low sense of attachment between an expectant mother and her unborn child could be associated with some infant developmental delays.

University of Queensland School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences researcher Ms Grace Branjerdporn has reached this conclusion in a study of more than 700 mother-child relationships.

"Findings suggest that lowered prenatal attachment was associated with suboptimal outcomes such as difficult infant temperament and

uncontrolled crying," Ms Branjerdporn said.

"People may think a bond between a mother and child begins when the mother cradles their newborn in their arms, but it begins well before they have met face-to-face," Ms Branjerdporn said.

"Research has shown prenatal attachment has an effect on a baby's personality, but we are still studying if it has a bearing on a baby's ability to master skills like walking, talking and problem-solving.

"Early findings from our study suggest that mothers with a stronger bond to their unborn babies were more likely to have babies that were proficient in a range of skills.

"The research provides the foundation for looking more closely at assessing and improving maternal-foetal attachment and giving kids a head-start before they are born."

Ms Branjerdporn's study, published in *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, was co-authored by Dr Pamela Meredith, Emeritus Professor Jenny Strong and Ms Jennifer Garcia.

The research is central to her PhD, which tracks mothers and children across the antenatal and postnatal period for two years.

It is hoped that the study's findings will inform future interventions to support prenatal attachment and promote infant development.

The next stage of Ms Branjerdporn's research will be uncovering new avenues for mothers to develop stronger bonds with their unborn babies.

This will focus on women who have experienced perinatal loss, such as through miscarriage.

"By supporting women in this critical time of life, we can unleash the potential of the next generation," Ms Branjerdporn said.

Provided by University of Queensland

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