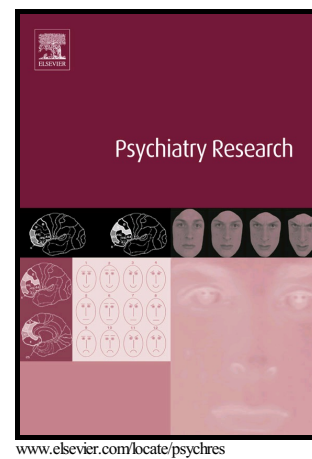


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Fetal exposure to maternal stress and risk for schizophrenia spectrum disorders among offspring:
Differential influences of fetal sex

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Abstract

Exposure to adverse life events during pregnancy has been linked to increased risk of schizophrenia spectrum disorders (SSD) in offspring. Nevertheless, much of the previous work inferred maternal stress from severe life events rather than directly assessing maternal reports of stress. The present study aimed to examine maternal reports of stress during pregnancy and risk for offspring SSD. Participants were 95 SSD cases and 206 controls who were offspring from a large birth cohort study that followed pregnant women from 1959-1966. During pregnancy interviews, women were asked if anything worrisome had occurred recently. Interviews were qualitatively coded for stress-related themes, including reports of daily life stress, by two independent raters. None of the maternal psychosocial stress themes were significantly associated with increased odds of offspring SSD in analyses of the full sample. However, results indicated a significant daily life stress by infant sex interaction. Maternal daily life stress during pregnancy was associated with significantly increased odds of SSD among male offspring. Findings suggest sex-specific fetal sensitivity to maternal reported daily life stress during pregnancy on risk for SSD, with males appearing to be more vulnerable to the influences of maternal stress during pregnancy.

Keywords: psychosis, sex differences, prenatal stress

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