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Maternal parity and perinatal cortisol adaptation:
The role of pregnancy-specific distress and implications for postpartum mood

Running Head: Distress, Cortisol, and Postpartum Mood

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Highlights

- Primiparas show higher levels of mid- and late pregnancy cortisol than multiparas.
- Primiparas show greater pregnancy-specific distress than multiparas.
- The association between parity and cortisol is partially accounted for by distress.
- At postpartum, cortisol levels poorly predict mood among multiparas.
- At postpartum, greater cortisol levels predict poorer mood among primiparas.

Abstract

Introduction. Compared to women who have given birth before (i.e., multiparas), those giving birth for the first time (i.e., primiparas) show higher cortisol levels. Psychological factors may play a role; hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal activation is a well-described stress response.

Primiparity also predicts greater risk for postpartum depression, which may be related to greater correspondence between cortisol and mood following prenatal cortisol elevations. The current

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