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Becoming mothers after an oncological diagnosis: an observational longitudinal study about psychological aspects and influence on maternal attachment

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Background: Pregnancy is crucial for the construction of the mother-infant relationship, which is of great importance for the child's development. Maternal exposure to stressful life events during pregnancy may be linked to adverse outcomes in children. Although several authors consider cancer a 'critical life event' and have underlined the importance of psychological factors during pregnancy, studies that investigated motherhood after an oncological diagnosis are still scarce.

Objective: The main aim of this study was to investigate psychological aspects in a clinical sample composed of pregnant women with previous or current cancer diagnosis and of their partners. We would like to investigate prenatal attachment and representations, quality of life, in terms of psychological and emotional functioning, perceived social support, trauma-related response and resilience processes.

Method: A first assessment will be conducted during the last trimester of pregnancy and a second three months after delivery to a sample of 40 patients.

Both parents will be asked to complete the following questionnaires: Prenatal Attachment Inventory, Maternal Antenatal Attachment Scale (only mothers), Baby Care Questionnaire, World Health Organization

Quality of Life, Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, Profile of Mood States, Impact of Event Scale-Revised, Centrality of Events Scale, Parenting Stress Index and the. Finally, a semi-structured interview will be conducted to investigate maternal representations of the child in depth.

Conclusions: Exploring the impact of the cancer event on the construction of mother-child relationship would be of great applicative relevance to identify individuals at risk which could benefit from perinatal and postnatal support.