The Impact of the Baby’s Congenital Malformation on the Mother’s Psychological Well-Being: An Empirical

Contribution on the Clubfoot

Gabrielle Coppola, PhD,\* Alessandro Costantini, PhD,w Rosa Tedone, Psy.D,z Simona Pasquale, Psy.D,z Lucia Elia, PhD,z Mariagrazia Foschino Barbaro, Psy.D,y and Ignazio d’Addetta, MD8

**Background**: Empirical findings show that the child’s illness can interfere with parental well-being and with the construction of a well-functioning effective relationship between the child and his/her caregivers. In line with these findings, the present study aims at investigating the negative impact of the baby’s diagnosis of clubfoot on the mother and the protective function of social support; moreover, the study aims at implementing, as a pilot experience, an intervention protocol directed to the same sample of mothers, providing emotional and informational support.

**Methods**: A sample of 34 mothers was recruited within the first 3 months of the baby’s life, including 2 groups: a clinical one, with 17 mothers of babies diagnosed with clubfoot, and a control one, with 17 mothers of healthy full-term babies. The participants completed the following instruments in 1 session: the Beck Depression Inventory-II, the Rapid Stress Assessment questionnaire, the Brief COPE, and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support.

**Results**: The results show that the mothers in the clinical group, compared with those in the control group, reported more stress and depressive symptoms in reaction to the birth of their baby. Moreover, they displayed a pattern of coping strategies different from those of control mothers and coherent with the meaning of having a baby with a malformation. Lastly, the group condition (clinical vs. control) significantly moderated the association of social support with stress and depression.

**Conclusions**: These preliminary findings highlight the negative impact that the congenital malformation of clubfoot can have on mothers’ psychological well-being and the protective role of social support. Moreover, the positive feedback from the mothers receiving emotional and informational support confirms the importance of implementing intervention protocols in the hospital unit directed to parents of babies with a congenital malformation.

Key Words: clubfoot, stress, depression, coping, social support (J Pediatr Orthop 2012;32:521–526)

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