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Idealization and Reality: Screening for Mother-Child Support Levels in Pregnancy and the Reality Experienced Six Months Postpartum
Julie Quinlivan (Australia)
Objectives: To evaluate to what extent teenage mothers are able to predict their postnatal support networks in the antenatal period, and the extent to which support correlates with social class and depressive symptomatology. Design: A prospective cohort study. Setting: Teenage antenatal clinic Population: Teenage mothers (n=124) aged less than 18 years. Methods: Women were surveyed in the antenatal period and again six months postpartum about their anticipated and actual levels of support using the Maternal Social Support Index (MSSI). The questionnaire covered key issues involved in discharge planning such as the availability of help with household tasks, emergency respite and communication. Subjects also completed social class data and the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale. Data were analyzed using SAS software (2001). Results: The key finding was that teenage mothers significantly overestimated their support networks in the antenatal period compared to the reality experienced 6 months postpartum ($p<0.0001$). Dissatisfaction was most marked in the communication and daily activity support subscales. The level of support at 6 months postpartum correlated significantly with the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression score but not with social class. Conclusion: Services for teenage mothers that provide assistance with communication and daily support activities are required to help overcome the discrepancies between idealization and reality. Depressive symptomatology correlates with poor support levels.