Postnatal effects in fatherhood: a comparison of levels of perceived stress in Swedish and French new fathers

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POSTNATAL EFFECTS IN FATHERHOOD:
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In modern society, the role of fathers in parenthood tends to be as considered as the role of mothers. Becoming parent can lead to some positive effects, but also to some negative ones, which may have serious consequences on both parents and on the child. The purpose of the present work was to investigate whether a difference of a specific postpartum effect with regard to levels of perceived stress could be noticed in Swedish and French men who just became fathers for the first time. In this study, we pointed out the stress in daily life and the stress related to the role as a parent. All participants (nSwedish = 20; nFrench = 31) were men who became fathers for the first time a year or less before the measurement of stress. A questionnaire was submitted online and the data were analyzed using t-tests in order to measure the differences between French and Swedish regarding stress and ANCOVAs in order to measure if age and duration of the relationship have an impact on stress level. The results showed that Swedish fathers have a significantly higher perceived stress level than French fathers. However, there is no effect of age and duration of the relationship on the results. Moreover, no differences were found with respect to fathers’ parenting stress level.

Keyword: transition to fatherhood, first child, parental stress, perceived stress.

Most studies dealing with parenthood focus on mothers. A main reason is that, obviously, woman bears her child and she is therefore the first to feel changes, movements or feelings that pregnancy brings. However, having a baby has to be considered in a triad relationship because apart from the specific relation between a woman and her baby, there is a third actor who has to be considered: the father. All over the world, father gets a specific place, mainly due to cultures and to laws, which deal with social compliance or parental leave for instance. The evolution in attitudes and practices underlines the essential role which is given to fathers. For instance, in 2013, a paternity leave is available in 78 countries over 164 and it is compensated for 70 countries among those 78. Actually, there is a significant link made between parental leave taken by fathers, their role regarding familial responsibilities and their child’s development (ILO, 2014). Moreover, at the European scale, there are also some differences. For example, in Sweden, the paternity leave has been established in 1974 and
allowed fathers to get between 30 and 420 days off (EuroFound, 2007). In comparison, in France, fathers can have between 3 and 14 days off since 2002 (Service Public, 2015). Even if there are different hypotheses regarding multiple roles (many different activities and responsibilities would generate more pressure) and genders (division of duties), it remains a link between being a parent and being stressed. Indeed, the quality of parental role, including effect of parental leave, has an impact on health (e.g. health-damaging attitudes, behaviors and life roles) (Månsdotter et al, 2007). Even if Sweden and France are both European countries, there is a legal gap and more broadly a specific father’s status regarding those two countries. Related to Swedish and French characteristics, it is thus important to care about the link that might appear between becoming a parent and being stressed.

As a rule of thumb, becoming a parent for the first time is probably one of the most stressful life time for a woman, a man, or a couple. Parenthood is a couple and a society concern as it can call habits, expectations or functioning into question (Craig & Mullan, 2010). In modern society, especially in Western Europe, there are many considerations regarding parenthood e.g. equality gender, childcare, family conception, etc. Sweden, as a Scandinavian country, follows the Nordic model, which is mainly based on universalism and egalitarianism and tends to improve a welfare state. For instance, gender equality, in a professional and a personal way, is a major aspect in the Nordic welfare state model (Ellingsæter, 2006). In France, there is also the same wish to consider childcare as a society concern and a personal responsibility. However, even if there are lots of means permitting to the mother to keep her job, be paid and take care of her baby at the same time, gender equity is not a major priority (Craig & Mullan, 2010). Thus, it should be interesting to study Swedish and French society features in depth in order to target and to understand the origin of the parental stress.

From an individual perspective, expecting a baby is generally reported as a source of joy and a social emancipation but it can also be synonym of psychological stress, anxiety and a hardship for the couple. Personality development can evolve toward changes in attachment, gender personality or self-esteem (Roberts et al., 2002). Emotionality (i.e. tendency to feel negative emotion), one of the basic traits of the personality, tends to change when a baby arrives and those fluctuations show that becoming parents does not illustrate properly a psychological maturity. However, regarding men more specifically, it appears that becoming father tends to strengthen baseline sociability (making a sociable man even more sociable after having a baby). Indeed, recent fathers would take advantage of all opportunities to be more involved in social relations (Jokela et al., 2009). Two invested parents have different and complementary behaviors which may influence child development (cognitive, linguistic and social skills), especially during the first months (Pancsofar & Vernon-Feagans 2006). Parental love in general has also an influence on child development, on his health and on his psychological well-being, from infancy until young adulthood. Regarding this, it might happen that inappropriate paternal (and maternal) love is associated with several outcomes like personality or psychological issues (Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). Therefore, in addition to societies’ features, parenthood should also be considered as a couple and a personal problematic.
Moreover, about the relationship per se with the child, the majority of parents get a strong attachment appearing immediately after the birth. Nevertheless, it exists several differences between father and mother emotional involvement due to respective moment spend with the child that strengthen the bond (breast feeding with the mother, diapers changing with one parent or the other, etc.) (Figueiredo et al., 2007). The attachment orientation of the parent toward the child is based on the perception of oneself, on the marital situation and on the support sought, given and received by and from the partner. For instance, if some fathers feel that they were supportive enough during and after the pregnancy, they would be less avoidant than not invested fathers. Transition to parenthood, and thus to fatherhood, generates an increase of stress level beginning several weeks before the birth itself and working models (security, ambivalence, avoidance) would orient parents to adjust their attachment styles depending on the amount of perceived stress (Simpson et al., 2003). Besides, there are important changes that occur during the first year of child life that might also be perceived as stressful for fathers. Actually, familial functioning would be predictors of fathers’ parenting stress and behavior (more than mothers’ status for instance) (Grynch & Clark, 1999). Overall, even though fathers report their stress over marital satisfaction, involvement in caregiving and child’s temperament, the most stressful event in the transition to fatherhood is the pregnancy per se, with a decrease of the stress during the first three months after the delivery. Furthermore, the relationship between partners could also change dramatically with time. The transition to parenthood includes obviously a change from a two-person relationship to a three-person relationship; hence, the relationship tends to deteriorate during postnatal period (general stress due to the presence of the baby; gap between expectations and reality, etc.) (Condon et al., 2004). Therefore, it is important to take into account consequences of stress on child development (including attachment orientation) on the one hand and on partner relationship on the other hand.

As previously described, transition to parenthood could be a source of stress in many ways. Another influential aspect would be the professional situation. Indeed, when both parents work, the transition to parenthood is lived as a higher stressful situation (especially for the mother) than when there is just one worker in the couple (Feldman et al., 2004). Another element, which could compromise mental health well-being of the parent, would be the age at first birth. Indeed, in the US, there is an association between this age and a depression state: parents being less than 23 years old feel more depressed than non-parents. However, fathers who delayed parenthood would feel less depressed (later marriage, longer education, good job, health and economic situation) (Mirowsky & Ross, 2002). Moreover, from an experiment about Swedish fathers, having a baby is generally described as a positive event but it can also be considered as a negative event due to several reasons: the mode of birth (e.g. emergency caesarean and instrumental vaginal birth), a dissatisfaction about medical care, a lack of support (especially when father is not considered anymore as soon as there is an emergency), or a restrictive involvement in the decision-making process (including a relationship of trust with health care professionals) (Johansson et al., 2012). In addition, fathers have the wish to provide enough material support that can be synonym of financial and work stress, as well as a good fatherhood model (including an involved father). Moreover, having a strong relationship and thus creating a bond with their new baby born as soon as possible is also a
request from fathers (Vehviläinen & Liukkonen, 1998). Finally, it could be harder for a man than for woman to seek for some help regarding emotional issue and that can also lead to stress and inappropriate behaviors (Condon & al. 2004). Thus, it is important to target a potential source of stress and once it is done, supportive professional and familial surroundings are necessary in order to ease the stress and to satisfy fathers’ requests.

In some cases, when the source of stress is not defined or when stressed mother or father are not addressed to professionals, both of them may live depressive episodes. Most studies regarding postpartum depression focus on mothers but fathers can also be depressed and this can have an effect on child’s wellbeing depending on fathers’ mood changes (Ramchandani et al., 2005 in Madsen et al., 2007). Indeed, recent fathers may feel changes in many ways as described previously and thus paternal depression would be associated to negative emotion and behavioral outcomes in later child’s life. Moreover, depression could occur not only during postnatal period but also during antenatal period. However, depending on studies, postnatal depression would affect from 2% to 10% of fathers during the first weeks after the delivery (Wee et al., 2011). It is also admitted that the mental state of the partner may have an impact on the stress level and thus on a potential depression. That kind of stressful event could not only have an impact on the partner but also on the couple’s relationship per se, on the parent-child relation and on child’s development by extension. An over sensitive surrounding and a weak social support for instance could lead to a postpartum depression (Wee et al., 2011). Moreover, fathers have lower rates of distress or depression than mothers during the first postpartum year. However, they may also underestimate their stress level and report a stable level of acknowledged stress. Moreover, couple morbidity (accumulation of issues) increases over time and compromises the understanding of risks factors, treatment and preventive interventions regarding depression (Matthey et al., 2000). Therefore, considering the multitude of different sources of stress in transition to parenthood, and to fatherhood, it is important to study this psychological phenomenon not only regarding mothers but also regarding fathers.

According to some expectant women, fathers are seen as a physical and emotional support and their support is central in the transition to parenthood. It is also reported that this kind of support leads to a stronger family frame, a longer paternity leave, a more relevant preoccupation regarding the child and a better professional work adaptation after the birth (Feldman et al., 2004). Added to a solid link created with their partner, it seems that first-time fathers have strong attitudes regarding fatherhood, either if they come from a nurturing family or a distant one. Actually, fathers take for model a positive family environment background whereas they run away from a negative one, even more when there was a prior father-son conflict (Beaton & Doherty, 2007). Fathers’ influence on child development has been underestimated for a while and this is one of the reasons why health care centers, hospital staff or general external factors have been reorganized in order to provide the place that any father deserves. For instance, there is an anticipatory work which is available in order to avoid recent fathers to feel completely lost once the baby is at home and in order to adjust their expectations with the reality (Henderson & Brouse, 1990). Among different resources helping fathers to cope with stressful events during postpartum period, the most valued are the
partner, the maternal grandmother and health care professionals. Actually, it is not just a childbirth that partners experiment but also a family birth and nursing action should be required at that time in order to help the couple to find a way to support each other, to express respective feelings etc. Indeed, a couple has needs, mothers and fathers have specific needs that health care professionals have to be able to satisfy (Montigny et al., 2006). It also appears that first-time fathers feel more uncomfortable than several-times fathers and have higher stress responses regarding the childbirth process (pregnancy, labor pain, etc.). Therefore, it is important to pay more attention to these formers. In this context, the work of midwives (seen as professional and reliable), in addition to a quiet and comfortable surroundings, permits to relax future fathers (Vehviläinen & Liukkonen, 1998). Moreover, studies permit to make antenatal experiences and men’s anxieties more understandable and manageable. Indeed, concerns about preventative natal mental health and men’s emotional health is an important step for health care professionals, and obviously for future parents (Fenwick et al., 2012). Nevertheless, even if some solutions are provided in order to satisfy fathers’ requests, it remains important to deepen professional knowledge and to improve fathers’ stress care.

However, fathers’ involvement depends not only on men themselves, on professional concern or on personal surroundings, it also depends on cultural context. For instance, in society which values gender equality as it is the case in Sweden, as well as in France but less markedly, a “paternal control” (i.e. paternal authority) could disturb infant’s social development. However, in a non-Western European society, fathers’ authority is seen as beneficial for the child. This is why it is important to analyze paternal behavior in a specific cultural context (Feldman & Nasalha, 2010 in Boyd & Bee, 2012). Moreover, in countries from Western Europe, even if it remains a strict division of parental roles with a mother seen as a caregiver and a father seen as a playmate, some changes occurred last decades ago regarding women’s workforce participation and there is a mutual consent regarding fathers’ role allowing them to take an important part into caregiving as well. From a policy point of view, Sweden is the first country to offer fathers a parental leave in 1974 and set up a non-transferable leave including a “Daddy month” in 1995, extended to two months in 2002 which is a leave quota that fathers can take. Actually, the number of fathers who has taken at least one month of parental leave increased by 50% since 1995 (Ekberg, 2013). The success of Swedish parental policy would be indeed the fact that fathers are involved in childcare, more than in housework for instance (Thomas & Hildingsson, 2009). In France, the debate remains focused on maternal leave, putting paternal leave into the background. The introduction in 2002 of a short parental leave gives rise to debate but fathers are few to take this leave even if it represents a great point to get deeper into fathers’ involvement. Being a new area in Europe, work-family policies for men tend to be improved, following the Nordic model and its gender equality policies. Moreover, men in general agree with that model, indicating that they feel the need to be more involved with their child and they admit that responsibilities have to be shared between mothers and fathers regarding work-family conflict like it is the case in Sweden (Fox et al., 2009). Another point that could illustrate an evolution in fathers’ involvement is the presence during the delivery. Indeed, for instance in Sweden, about 95% of fathers are present at that moment whereas there are about 70% in France (Madsen et al., 2007). Overall, special features of Swedish and French society, parental perceived stress in
general (including couple and personal problematic), consequences of stress on family, specificity of fatherhood and fathers’ stress care are all subjects that deserved to be study in a particular context.

The purpose of the present study was to investigate if there is a measurable stress and relevant differences between Swedish and French recent fathers. The aim of this study was thus to measure and to compare stress level, a postnatal effect, for both Swedish and French fathers, who became parents for the first time. Sweden and France are two Western European countries with different policies and with specific place left to fathers. As a consequence, we hypothesized that French fathers would have higher perceived stress level and higher parental stress level compared to Swedish fathers. In addition, we made assumptions that age and duration of the relationship might have an impact on stress level in the two groups.

Method

Participants and procedure

A total of fifty-one (51) recent fathers from Sweden and France answered an online questionnaire. Twenty (20) participants were Swedish and thirty-one (31) were French. The inclusion criterion was that men should have been fathers for the first time less than one year ago and to be either Swedish or French. The reason of the first birth choice was because becoming parent for the first time is a change that involves a certain amount of stress which might decrease from birth to birth. Moreover, the choice of the period (less than one year) was because there are others sensitive variables which occur around this period as language or walk and could have also an impact on stress level.

Participants were recruited at a national scale through broad social network and connections (Medical Center Services, Öppen Förskola, social networks, etc.). There was no specific location of the experiment since a web link for the questionnaire was available online permitting participants to answer directly on internet from their home. Moreover, there was no remuneration for the experiment and the participation was voluntary and anonymous.

Instrumentation and statistics

The instrumentation consisted in submitting an online questionnaire which was divided into three parts. The questionnaire was written in English and French for Swedish and French participants, respectively.

The first part dealt with general information regarding fathers and their baby (age, profession, baby’s gender, baby’s weight, etc.).

The second part was the Perceived Stress Questionnaire (PSQ). The version of the PSQ (Levenstein et al., 1993; Rönnlund, Vestergren, Stenling, Bergdahl, & Bergdahl, in press) consisted in answering 30 questions out of which 22 were found to reflect five different factorially distinct dimensions: demands (6 items), worries and tension (4 items), lack of joy (4 items), conflict (3 items), and fatigue (4 items) which measure stress level in daily life. For
this part, fathers had to evaluate 30 propositions on a four-graded Likert type rating (from “never”, coded as 1 to “usually”, coded as 4) regarding stress in general. The entire PSQ questionnaire is supplied in Appendix A.

Finally, the third part was the Parental Stress Scale (PSS) which was composed of 18 items representing variety of emotional and role satisfaction variables regarding fatherhood (Berry & Jones, 1995). Participants had to evaluate their stress level through 18 propositions on a five-graded Likert type rating (from “strongly disagree”, coded as 1 to “strongly agree”, coded as 5) relative to their role as father. The entire PSS questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

The comparison between two groups was carried out by t-tests for independent samples for both PSQ and PSS. In addition, we ran an analysis of covariance in order to test possible effect of age and duration of the relationship among stress level.

Results

The results obtained regarding general information are reported in Table 1. They show that fathers mean age is close to 32 years old for both categories ($M_{\text{Swedish}} = 32.1$; $M_{\text{French}} = 31.4$). They are in couple (or married) with the mother of their child and the average of the relationship is around 7 years ($M_{\text{Swedish}} = 7.4$; $M_{\text{French}} = 7.2$). More than 50% of them are managers or professionals and the rest works in services and sales or has an elementary occupation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Swedish fathers (n = 20)</th>
<th>French fathers (n = 31)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of the relationship (years)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craft</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager, professional</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technician, clerical</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services, sales</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant, elementary</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Infant characteristics are presented in Table 2. They indicate that there is an equal number of male and female Swedish babies ($n_{\text{male}} = n_{\text{female}} = 10$) and there are slightly more male French babies than female ones ($n_{\text{male}} = 17$; $n_{\text{female}} = 14$). Moreover, babies mean age is close to 6 months old for both categories ($M_{\text{Swedish}} = 6.4$; $M_{\text{French}} = 5.9$). There are no
significant differences in type of birth (regular vs complicated delivery) for the two groups ($\chi^2(1) = 1.22; p > 0.05$) nor for birth weights ($F(1) = 0.132; p > 0.05$).

Table 2. Infants’ characteristics classified by group (n = 51)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Swedish babies (n = 20)</th>
<th>French babies (n = 31)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (months)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of birth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not regular</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight (kg)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results obtained for the comparison of PSQ and PSS between the two fathers’ groups (Swedish and French) are presented in Table 3. A $t$-test with respect to PSQ scores showed that Swedish fathers have significantly higher scores compared to French fathers ($t(49) = -2.27; p < 0.05$). However, a $t$-test with respect to PSS scores indicated no tendency of a difference between Swedish and French fathers in stress level ($t(49) = -0.373; p > 0.05$).

Table 3. Comparison of means, standard deviations (SD) and standard errors of mean (SEM) of dependant variables in fathers’ groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependant variable</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>SEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PSQ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish fathers</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French fathers</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swedish fathers</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French fathers</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to find the source of differences in PSQ scores, we computed subscales scores (fatigue, conflict, tension/worries, lack of joy and demands) by taking the means of relevant items and making a $t$-test for each subscale scores. As a result, it appeared that it is the subcomponent “demands” which has the most important influence on perceived stress level (Figure 1). Indeed, even if there is statistically no evidence that nationality has a significant effect on perceived demands level ($t(49) = -1.876; p = 0.067 > 0.05$), it is slightly close to be the case, whereas it is not at all the case regarding other categories.
In order to compare general stress level to a more global population, we calculated the PSQ-index (Bergdahl & Bergdahl, 2002) for each nationality. In the PSQ-Index, the cut-off score for moderate level of perceived stress was estimated to be $> 0.34 - \leq 0.46$ (based on Swedish population). The mean score of the whole population studied was 0.42 and the standard deviation was 0.09. French and Swedish fathers have a PSQ-index of respectively 0.39 and 0.45 which means that they are both at a moderate level, even though Swedish are closer to the high level of perceived stress (PSQ-index $> 0.46$) than French (Figure 2).

In addition, an ANCOVA permitted to test the effect of age and duration of the relationship as a covariance in perceived stress level. Respecting linearity and homogeneity of regression, we found that nationality has a statistically significant difference in the means (French and Swedish) after having controlled age ($F (1) = 0.131; p > 0.05$) and duration of the relationship ($F (1) = 1.247; p > 0.05$). Hence, there is no effect of age and duration of the relationship on perceived stress level.
Discussion

The transition to fatherhood can imply many changes in personal and professional life, and stress may be a consequence of those changes. Depending on cultures, policies or place given to fathers in societies, Swedish and French fathers may face up in their own way this specific postnatal effect. In this context, the present research examined differences in the transition to parenthood for the first time between Swedish and French men with respect to perceived stress and parenting stress. Regarding to the social context (gender equity, parental leave, etc.), we hypothesized that French fathers would tend to be more stressed than Swedish ones. However, the findings did not confirm this hypothesis entirely.

Actually, Swedish fathers are associated with a significant higher expression of perceived stress in comparison to French fathers. Moreover, with a deeper analysis of different subscales included in PSQ namely fatigue, conflict, tension, lack of joy and demands, the latter one tends to make a difference compared to other subscales. Indeed, the amount of stress perceived by Swedish fathers would be mainly due to high perceived demands. Actually, Swedish fathers may feel stressed because society and familial surroundings are perceived as demanding. In a more general way, with respect to PSQ-index, even though Swedish and French fathers are both at a moderate level of stress compared to general Swedish population (> 0.34 - ≤ 0.46), Swedish fathers are close to be at the high level (PSQ-Index = 0.45). Nevertheless, further studies would be needed to understand the origin of perceived stress of fathers.

ANCOVAs permitted to study the age and the duration of the relationship and did not show any effect on perceived stress level. Regarding those two factors, we concede that the small size of the sample and the closeness of most part of participants to respective means did not allow us to make a relevant conclusion. Moreover, there are no differences between Swedish and French fathers regarding parenting stress level. One of the reasons of this result may be due to a potential underestimation of perceived parental stress by fathers because there is no specific moment for them to express their feelings or because they think that mother’ stress is the priority and their stress has to be put into the background. Another explanation could be that fathers’ behaviors and society expectations match properly. Indeed, depending on the society, Swedish and French fathers can perfectly fulfill what is expected from them (for example from their familial surroundings or their partner) and thus do not perceived any stress. Actually, this study was based on quantitative approaches but it is obvious that qualitative approaches are necessary if one wants to go deeper in the role of father (including the impact of it on child’s development). This is even more relevant when cultural context is getting more complex (Parke, 2004). For instance, qualitative analysis can study the way how men construct their masculinity through fatherhood. Indeed, depending on culture for example, fathers occupy different roles (Lamb, 2009). Regarding this, it would be major for future research to study and to understand the way cultures consider fathers’ roles and behaviors. Moreover, it would also be interesting to focus future research on intergenerational bond between fathers and their adult child as well as the role of grandfathers (Parke, 2004).
In order to target more precisely a possible source of stress regarding the present study, it might have been interesting to specify the reason of the pregnancy (planned event or unexpected event). Another relevant element would have to ask the amount of parental leave taken. Thus, it would have permitted to analyze the relation between reasons of pregnancy, days of leave and stress level. Moreover, regarding parental leave, it would have been interesting to control maternity leave in order to point out whether it has effects on fathers’ perceived stress. However, in parallel to PSQ and PSS, some fathers left comments that illustrated optimistic attitudes. Indeed, even if some periods were perceived as particularly stressful (first days at home, financial adaptation or sleep deprivation) they were all put into perspective with amount of love and happiness that a new baby born brings. In addition, it can be assumed that fathers who did answer to the questionnaire felt comfortable with their stress and may not have enough distance to realize how having a baby can be stressful. About that point, a longitudinal experiment could be relevant in order to measure the evolution of stress level from the delivery to early childhood. Indeed, there are several crucial steps during first years of development (motor functions, language skills, brain plasticity, etc.) that may represent an additional stress for parents if some of them occur with delay.

Besides societies’ expectation and familial context, the parents’ location may also have an impact on stress level. Hence, future studies with a wider sample of participants would permit to measure for instance the differences in parental stress level between cities and countryside. Moreover, regarding parents location, we could also question the fact that national events might change future parents’ opinion about society and the way they will raise their child (e.g. terrorist attack, radical policy, etc.). Overall, stressful situations due to complexity of society underline the importance to consider different groups belonging to it (ethnic origin, cultural context, socio-economic situation, etc.). Hence, those considerations would permit to develop and to program proper policies for children and families in agreement with various cultures.

In future qualitative, longitudinal or cultural studies, it would also be important to measure stress level when a second baby arrives in the family and compare this level with previous measurements in order to study what kind of differences could be noticed. Another point to study would be potential infantile pathologies. Indeed, some diseases are predictable like chromosomal diseases (e.g. trisomy), some may happen after birth like congenital diseases, some are genetic (e.g. Huntington’s disease) and some are developmental pathologies (e.g. dyslexia). For instance, previous studies showed that parents of autistic child would be more stressed than others, even though a suitable surrounding (marital situation, school, community, etc.) could ease the lack of well-being (Johnson & Simpson, 2013). Nevertheless, a huge amount of perceived stress in that kind of situation could easily lead to an avoidant attachment style and make the familial functioning even more complex. Hence, future studies would permit to find the origin of multiple sources of stress in those specific family structures (e.g. more than one child, handicapped child, diseased child, etc.).
From a biological point of view, it has been demonstrated that father’s hormones levels change during mother’s pregnancy and childbirth, which is also linked to social changes. Indeed, a lower testosterone level leads to an increase of the responsiveness to baby cries as well as couvade syndrome (sympathetic pregnancy) during pregnancy. Moreover, fathers’ and mothers’ hormonal level match, thus a strong bond between partners during pregnancy can stimulate hormonal changes and positively influence baby’s nurturing. For example, testosterones’ level decreases in fathers compare to non-fathers and this level is higher for first time fathers than for other fathers. These findings underlines that there is a link between hormonal system and behavioral changes that implies that men could be more prepared for fathering (Parke, 2004). Hence, it would be interesting to analyse deeper these biological changes and to study neurological aspects in relation with a high perceived stress level.

The present study contributed to underline the importance to consider fatherhood. Even though no differences were found regarding parenting stress level in the limited number of Swedish and French participants involved, it is essential to underline the importance of taking care of each parent, including fathers, who may suffer from having a baby. Indeed, the stress that may result from fatherhood has to be considered as painful as any psychological disorder. Thus, when stress is not target in time, it might lead to depression that professional and familial surroundings can ease. However, a difference was found in perceived stress between Swedish and French men. Thus, it should be interesting to pay attention to expectations required about young men in general, and not only recent fathers).

Throughout the present study, we attempted to describe and to explain stress of fathers in two Western European societies, Sweden and France. Indeed, societies have specific characteristics and thus becoming parents, fathers, implies to adapt to those features. However, parenthood is not only a society concern but also a couple and a personal problematic and all those components can increase perceived stress level. Moreover, this stress can have some consequences on daily life, familial functioning and on the baby himself (his development, his well-being, etc.). As a conclusion, it is important to consider both, mother and father, in the transition to parenthood in order to target sources of stress and thus to avoid serious psychological disorder. Professionals and closes relatives have to be aware of the fatherhood problematic, and this is why it is important to continue research about fatherhood in specifics context.
References


APPENDIX A

Study of stress among recent fathers

The purpose of this study is to measure stress in recent Swedish/French fathers and to put it in comparison with stress in young French/Swedish fathers. This research has received ethical approval from Umeå University for the completion of Master's Thesis in Psychology. The questionnaire takes about 10 minutes to get completed and there are no issues of confidentiality, as identifying information is not needed. Participation is voluntary and you may stop the procedure whenever you want. The questionnaire should be submitted before 20th of April 2015.

For more information, please contact me at julie.ratynska@gmail.com. Thanks a lot for your participation!

You and your baby

How old are you?

Where do you come from?
(residency area)

What is your professional situation? (ISCO)

- Manager
- Professional
- Technician
- Clerical support worker
- Service and sales worker
- Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery worker
- Craft and related trades worker
- Plant and machine operator, and assembler
- Elementary occupations
- Armed forces occupations
- Unemployed

Are you in couple with the mother of your child?

- Yes
- No
If yes, since how long?

What is your personal situation?

- Live as a couple
- Civil union
- Married
- Separated
- Divorced
- Widowed

What is your baby's gender?

- Girl
- Boy

How old is your baby?

What was your baby's weight at the delivery?

Comments (complicated pregnancy, unexpected caesarean, premature baby, etc.) (optional)

**Stress and you**

Regarding the following statements, just tick the number related to your answer

1: Never  2: Sometimes  3: Often  4: Usually

**You have too many things to do**

Never  1  2  3  4  Usually

**You feel under pressure from deadlines**

Never  1  2  3  4  Usually
You feel that too many demands are being made on you
Never 1 2 3 4 Usually

You have enough time for yourself
Never 1 2 3 4 Usually

You feel you’re in a hurry
Never 1 2 3 4 Usually

You have too many decisions to make
Never 1 2 3 4 Usually

You feel loaded down with responsibility
Never 1 2 3 4 Usually

You are under pressure from other people
Never 1 2 3 4 Usually

You feel frustrated
Never 1 2 3 4 Usually

You are irritable or grouchy
Never 1 2 3 4 Usually

You are afraid of the future
Never 1 2 3 4 Usually

You have trouble relaxing
Never 1 2 3 4 Usually

You feel tense
Never 1 2 3 4 Usually

You fear you may not manage to attain your goals
Never 1 2 3 4 Usually

You have many worries
Never 1 2 3 4 Usually

Your problems seem to be piling up
Never 1 2 3 4 Usually

You feel lonely or isolated
Never 1 2 3 4 Usually

You feel you’re doing things because you have to - not because you want to
Never 1 2 3 4 Usually
You feel safe and protected
Never 1 2 3 4 Usually

You feel calm
Never 1 2 3 4 Usually

You are lighthearted
Never 1 2 3 4 Usually

You enjoy yourself
Never 1 2 3 4 Usually

You feel you are doing things you really like
Never 1 2 3 4 Usually

You feel discouraged
Never 1 2 3 4 Usually

You feel criticized or judged
Never 1 2 3 4 Usually

You find yourself in situations of conflict
Never 1 2 3 4 Usually

You feel tired
Never 1 2 3 4 Usually

You feel rested
Never 1 2 3 4 Usually

You are full of energy
Never 1 2 3 4 Usually

You feel mentally exhausted
Never 1 2 3 4 Usually

Comments
You, your stress and your baby

Regarding the following statements, just tick the number related to your answer 1: Strongly disagree 2: Disagree 3: Undecided 4: Agree 5: Strongly agree

I am happy in my role as father
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

There is little or nothing I wouldn't do for my child if it was necessary
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

Caring of my child sometimes takes more time and energy than I have to give
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

I sometimes worry whether I am doing enough for my child
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

I feel close to my child
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

I enjoy spending time with my child
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

My child is an important source of affection for me
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

Having child gives me a more certain and optimistic view for the future
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

The major source of stress in my life is my child
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

Having a child leaves little time and flexibility in my life
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

Having a child has been a financial burden
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree
It is difficult to balance different responsibilities because of my child
Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  Strongly agree

The behavior of my child is often embarrassing or stressful to me
Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  Strongly agree

If I had to do over again, I might decide not to have a child
Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  Strongly agree

I feel overwhelmed by the responsibility of being a father
Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  Strongly agree

Having a child has meant having too few choices and too little control over my life
Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  Strongly agree

I am satisfied as a father
Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  Strongly agree

I find my child enjoyable
Strongly disagree  1  2  3  4  5  Strongly agree

Comments