19th International Congress

Past, Present and Future of the Pre- and Perinatal Psychology and Medicine

September, 24th - 27th in Heidelberg, Germany

Conference Report

Workshops

The congress opened on Thursday and Friday with two workshops. The renowned researcher in the prenatal and perinatal field, Phyllis Klaus, dealt with “The Use of Hypnosis and Brief Psychotherapy to Alleviate Medical and Psychological Complications of Pregnancy” ("Die Anwendung von Hypnose und Kurzpsychotherapie in der Behandlung medizinischer und psychologischer Schwangerschaftskomplikationen"). One of the great pioneers of prenatal psychology, David Chamberlain, gave an Insight into Existence in the Womb: “Windows on the Womb: Your First Nine Months! ("Einblick in das Dasein im Mutterleib: Die ersten 9 Monate unseres Lebens") at the latest stage of research, as presented in his shortly appearing book (recordings of the Workshops on DVD can be obtained from Frau Neff sabine-neff@t-online.de).
Congress Proceedings

After the President, Dr Rupert Linder, opened the congress, Charlotte Peterson, the American prenatal helper, presented the global diversity of dealing with pregnancy and birth. This makes clear how much societies and cultures can learn from each other and how productive exchange can be. Then the Cologne artist and art therapist, Klaus Evertz, described the central cultural-psychological significance of the prenatal and perinatal contents of cultural compositions and social systems.

The interdisciplinary vein of the ISPPM was subsequently followed in a knowledgeable survey by the English prenatal psychologist, Simon House, of the latest research on the “Epigenetic Mechanisms in Evolution and Development” ("Epigenetischen Mechanismen in Evolution und Entwicklung") which open totally new horizons to prenatal psychology about understanding the effect of early experience. A comprehensive résumé of our knowledge of prenatal and perinatal origins of illness in child and adulthood and personality disorders was given by the eminent pioneer and doyen of North American prenatal psychology, Thomas Verny. Despite the crowded programme this first evening offered a wide overview of the present day knowledge in prenatal psychology at differing levels.

On Saturday the practical applications of the knowledge of prenatal psychology in birth preparation and obstetrics were dealt with first. This concerns itself with a change in paradigms from a passive ‘letting it all happen’ during birth to an active childbirth and bringing the child into the world as described by the American pregnancy and birth helper, Susan Highsmith. In addition the knowledge of prenatal psychology about the pre-birth relationship and its furtherance, as provided by the bonding analysis developed by Hidas and Raffai, can also be used for the supportive accompaniment in assisted fertilisation, a process such as that developed by the Ulm psychoanalyst, Ute Auhagen-Stephanos. We would like to mention here her recently published book, “Damit mein Baby bleibt – Zwiesprache mit dem Embryo von Anfang an” ISBN 978-3-466-34544-1, Klösel Verlag.
The Cologne psychologist and bonding analyst, Hannelore Dehne, illustrated the amazingly constructive effect of bonding analysis in pregnancy problems/disorders. An effective fundamental résumé of the knowledge of prenatal psychology was drawn by the Dresden gynaecologist and obstetrician, Sven Hildebrandt, in his contribution “Midwives and Obstetricians as the Child’s First Educators” (“Hebammen und Geburtshelfer als erste Pädagogen des Kindes”). Of similar significance is prenatal knowledge for baby therapy and “cry baby clinics” as outlined by the Berlin psychologist and baby therapist, Gerd Poerschke, in the example of the work of the Berlin Cry Baby Clinics.

A completely different facet, that of therapeutic deep self-experience, was described in the contribution from Heike Rödel entitled ”When My Soul became Human” (“Als meine Seele Mensch wurde”) which outlined her process of development and integration during an self-experience therapy with Karlton Terry by means of a series of expressive pictures, see also her book of the same title published by Mattes Velag.

Invited was our project partner from the Ukraine, Prof. Dr Yana Zhernovaya from the Scientific Institute for Obstetrics, Gynaecology and Reproduction at the University of Kharkov, who talked about “Early Dialogue and Body-oriented Treatment for the Prevention of Miscarriages and Premature Birth” (“Frühen Dialog und körperorientierte Behandlung zur Vermeidung von Fehl- und Frühgeburten”)

An evening panel discussion on the “Past and Present of Prenatal and Perinatal Psychologie” with Rupert Linder, David Chamberlain, Jon RG Turner, Alfred Reron, Lucio Zichella, and Ludwig Janus again reflected the enthralling and extremely productive path of development of prenatal psychology from its beginnings with the foundation of the ISPPM in the early 1970s and the APPPAH at the beginning of the 1980s. The results radiated change and stimulation into the neighbouring fields of obstetrics, birth education, birth preparation, accompaniment during pregnancy, psychotherapy, psychology and cultural psychology.
On the final day practical matters were dealt with in the fields of application of prenatal and perinatal psychology, in particular dealing with premature children (Anna Regina Rodrigues from Spain, Ofra Lubetzky from Israel). The contribution from Gabriella Ferrari from Parma on "Bonding Analysis and its Application in Case of Breech Pregnancies" ("Anwendung der Bindungsanalyse bei Fällen mit Steißlage") demonstrated once again the astounding responsiveness of the child to offers of contact. The Polish gynaecologists, Prof. Dr Alfred Reron and Dr Mark Sajewicz had already shown the previous day how psychological aspects can be integrated into the scope of gynaecological and obstetrical treatment. A concluding panel discussion on the future of prenatal and perinatal psychology with statements: Prof. Dr. Peter Fedor-Freybergh, Dr. Ute Auhagen-Stephanos, Dr. Ludwig Janus, Dr. Helga Blazy, Gabriella Ferrari amongst others rounded off the Congress. There was unanimity on the significance and the great potentials of prenatal psychology in many fields and on the importance of creating training and further education facilities.

Also well received were the poster presentations, offered for the first time, as they have in the meantime become a matter of course at many other congresses: our members were so able to present their concerns and experiences, such as book presentations, project reports and experiential reports amongst others, to those interested.

The summaries of contents of the individual contributions can be found on the ISPPM website, see www.isppm.de. Some contributions will be published later in the “International Journal for Prenatal and Perinatal Psychology and Medicine” that appears in the Heidelberg Mattes Verlag, see www.mattes.de.