
CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	I
ABSTRACT	III
FIGURES AND TABLES	IX
1. Introduction	1
PART I THEORETICAL BACKGROUND	5
2. Stress	5
2.1 <i>History of the stress concept</i>	5
2.2 <i>Lazarus transaction theory of stress</i>	7
2.3 <i>Physiology of the stress system</i>	10
2.3.1 Stress response of the hypothalamic pituitary adrenal (HPA) axis	11
2.3.2 The autonomic nervous system (ANS)	14
2.4 <i>Cortisol and alpha-amylase – Indicators of stress</i>	17
2.4.1 Cortisol – Methodological issues	17
2.4.2 Alpha-amylase – Methodological issues	20
3. Physiological stress reactivity during pregnancy	25
3.1 <i>The HPA axis during pregnancy</i>	26
3.1.1 Basal stress hormones of the HPA axis during pregnancy	26
3.1.2 Interactions of placenta, maternal and fetal HPA axis	28
3.1.3 Stress reactivity of the prenatal maternal HPA axis – laboratory studies	29
3.1.4 The relation of self-report stress to the prenatal maternal HPA axis	31
3.2 <i>The ANS during pregnancy</i>	32
3.2.1 Basal physiology of the ANS during pregnancy	32
3.2.2 Stress reactivity of the ANS during pregnancy – laboratory studies	34
3.2.3 Self-report stress, anxiety and changes of the maternal ANS	36
3.3 <i>Methodological limitations of research on physiological stress reactivity in pregnancy</i>	37

3.4	<i>Dysregulations of the HPA axis and the ANS during pregnancy</i>	39
3.4.1	Dysregulations of the HPA axis, the ANS and pregnancy complications	39
3.4.2	Prenatal stress, HPA axis and fetal programming	40
3.5	<i>Conclusions</i>	41
4.	Psychosocial resources and pregnancy	43
4.1	<i>Social support and pregnancy</i>	43
4.1.1	Definition and research on social support	43
4.1.2	Effects of social support on stress and health during pregnancy	44
4.2	<i>Self-efficacy and pregnancy</i>	47
4.2.1	Definition and research on self-efficacy	47
4.2.2	Effects of self-efficacy on stress and health during pregnancy	49
4.3	<i>Daily uplifts and pregnancy</i>	50
4.3.1	Definition and research on daily uplifts	50
4.3.2	Effects of daily uplifts and hassles on stress and health during pregnancy	50
PART II	EMPIRICAL STUDIES	53
5.	Neuroendocrine and autonomic stress reactivity and recovery in human pregnancy	53
5.1	<i>Introduction</i>	53
5.2	<i>Methods</i>	57
5.2.1	Study participants	57
5.2.2	Study design	58
5.2.3	Outcome measures	60
5.2.4	Assays	61
5.2.5	Data analysis	62
5.3	<i>Results</i>	63
5.3.1	Sample characteristics	63
5.3.2	Psychological stress response	64
5.3.3	Cortisol stress response	65
5.3.4	Alpha-amylase stress response	66
5.3.5	Heart rate stress response	67
5.4	<i>Discussion</i>	73

6. Stress-buffering effects of psychosocial resources on physiological and psychological stress response in pregnant women	79
6.1 <i>Introduction</i>	79
6.2 <i>Methods</i>	83
6.2.1 Study participants	83
6.2.2 Outcome measures	83
6.2.3 Statistics	85
6.3 <i>Results</i>	86
6.3.1 Sample characteristics	86
6.3.2 Inter- and intra-correlations of independent and dependent variables	86
6.3.3 Psychological stress response	87
6.3.4 Physiological stress response	87
6.3.5 Effects of psychosocial resources on physiological stress response	89
6.3.6 Effects of psychosocial resources on psychological stress response	90
6.4 <i>Discussion</i>	93
PART III GENERAL DISCUSSION	99
7. Summary of the results	99
7.1 <i>Introduction</i>	99
7.2 <i>Neuroendocrine and autonomic stress reactivity and recovery in human pregnancy</i>	100
7.3 <i>Stress buffering effects of psychosocial resources on physiological and psychological stress response in pregnant women</i>	101
8. Methodological considerations and limitations	103
9. Discussion of the results	107
10. Clinical relevance and outlook	115
REFERENCES	117