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**Reference:**

Bleijenbergh Roxanne, Van den Branden Laura, van Gils Yannic, Van de Craen Natacha, Van Leugenhaege Luka, Fontein-Kuipers Yvonne.- Validation of the postpartum bonding questionnaire : a cross-sectional study among Flemish mothers  
Midwifery: an international journal - ISSN 1532-3099 - 107(2022), 103280  
Full text (Publisher's DOI): <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.MIDW.2022.103280>  
To cite this reference: <https://hdl.handle.net/10067/1859390151162165141>

# Validation of the Postpartum Bonding Questionnaire: a cross-sectional study among Flemish mothers

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Midwifery · Vol 107, 2022

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.midw.2022.103280>

## Abstract

### Objective

Becoming a mother is a process of transition that is subject to constant change and may last for over one year postpartum. Bonding is an important component of this transition to motherhood and can be measured with the Postpartum Bonding Questionnaire (PBQ). Most often, the PBQ is used among mothers up to 12 weeks postpartum. However, the transition to motherhood – and thus bonding – takes much longer and usually continues until 12 months postpartum.

### Design

Validation study to test the PBQ for validity and reliability for use among mothers up to one year postpartum. Internal consistency and construct validity were established using Cronbach's Alpha, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and subsequent confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).

**Setting** – mothers living in Flanders, Belgium

### Participants

The sample was composed of 254 Flemish mothers who had given birth to healthy neonates up to one year earlier.

### Findings

The EFA (principal component analysis) resulted in a uni-dimensional factor, "Impaired Bonding", consisting of 21 items. Four items were excluded because of a low factor load. This uni-dimensional version of the PBQ was checked with CFA, resulting in an acceptable model-of-fit: significant  $\chi^2$  ( $p < 0.001$ ), CMIN/df = 2.61, CFI = 0.85, RMSEA = 0.08. The internal consistency of the 21-item version showed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89.

**Key conclusion**

The 21-item version of the PBQ is a valid and reliable tool to identify bonding in a general population of Flemish mothers up to one year postpartum. Further research is of merit.

**Implications for practice**

After testing the Postpartum Bonding Questionnaire among a population of Flemish mothers up to one year postpartum, one dimension remained: "Impaired bonding", implying to play an important role during transition to motherhood. Measuring in this period emphasizes that in addition to monitoring the mother-infant bonding during pregnancy and early postpartum, it is of importance to extend the period of monitoring, that is, up to 12 months postpartum.

**Keywords:**

Mother–infant relationship; Bonding; Postpartum; Self-report questionnaires; Reliability; Validity

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## Introduction

Motherhood is recognized as a dynamic, life altering, and ongoing process of transition for its impact on the woman's life balance (Emmanuel et al., 2011; Fontein-Kuipers et al., 2019; George, 2011; Mercer, 2004; Rousseau et al., 2011). Transition theories assume that specific events such as motherhood or parenthood result in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles (Meleis, 2010; Schlossberg et al., 1995). A substantial number of new mothers are struggling with the process of becoming and/or being a mother or parent, for finding an equilibrium in new or renewed motherhood can be a challenge (Emmanuel et al., 2011; Mercer, 2004; Milgrom et al., 2011). An important aspect of functional transition to motherhood is the bonding process between mother and child (Mercer, 2004; van Beeck et al., 2019).

Bonding refers to how the mother feels towards her child and the development of her feelings towards motherhood (Taylor et al., 2005; Wittkowski et al., 2007b). The bond between a mother and her child is the extent to which the mother offers her child protection, comfort and care. This bond is expected to be characterized by positive feelings and thoughts, warmth and affection (Taylor et al., 2005). Therefore, mother-infant bonding is a unidirectional mechanism from mother to child (Bicking Kinsey and Hupcey, 2013; de Cock et al., 2016). An imbalance in motherhood or experiencing problems in mastering the mother or parent role influences and/or is likely to disrupt mother-infant bonding (Aber et al., 2013; Mercer, 2004; Nelson, 2003; Rousseau et al., 2011; Rubin, 1967).

The association between postpartum bonding and emotional well-being cannot be ignored (Cuijllits et al., 2019; Garcia-Esteve et al., 2016; Milgrom et al., 2011; Tsivos et al., 2011; Wiguna and Ismail, 2019). The prevalence of impaired bonding between mother and child one year after childbirth varies between 5% and 11%, which may have a significant impact on maternal, family and public health (Tichelman et al., 2019). Several studies have reported that the mother-child bond has a major effect on children's long-term development. For example, a healthy mother bond supports the health and well-being of babies, effectuating in affirmative cognitive, neurobehavioral and socio-emotional development, physical and emotional health and interpersonal relationships of toddlers, children and teenagers. In contrast, impaired bonding negatively affects all these developmental aspects (Ainsworth and Bell, 1972; Tichelman et al., 2019; Wiguna and Ismail, 2019). The strategies to prevent impaired bonding and its consequences are needed. One of these strategies is measuring bonding during the postpartum period.

There are various instruments that measure bonding; MAI<sup>1</sup>, MIAS<sup>2</sup>, MABISC<sup>3</sup>, MPAS<sup>4</sup>, PBQ<sup>5</sup>, MIBS<sup>6</sup>, MIRFS<sup>7</sup>, MORS-SR<sup>8</sup>, of which only the PBQ, MIBS and MPAS have been translated into Dutch (van Bussel et al., 2010; Wittkowski et al., 2020). Wittkowski et al. (2020) investigated their psychometric properties and clinical utility. Only the “Postpartum Bonding Questionnaire” (PBQ) was found to demonstrate sufficient evidence for structural validity, internal consistency, and reliability, showing high quality of evidence. The PBQ was also the most frequently adapted tool which is indicative of its perceived relevance and popularity in this field. Brockington et al. (2001) developed the “Postpartum Bonding Questionnaire”. This is a self-reporting questionnaire to measure the mother-infant bonding from the woman’s perspective. The PBQ is a self-reporting questionnaire that is easy to administer. This measure is one of the most frequently and widely used questionnaires by obstetricians, midwives and other primary care providers as a screening tool to detect mothers at risk of impaired bonding (Kaneko and Honjo, 2014; van Bussel et al., 2010; Wittkowski et al., 2020). The PBQ is also regularly used in scientific research (Kaneko and Honjo, 2014; Ohashi et al., 2016; Reck et al., 2006; Suetsugu et al., 2015; van Bussel et al., 2009; Wittkowski et al., 2007a, b).

Most often, the PBQ has been administered among populations of mothers up to 12 weeks postpartum. However, the transition to motherhood – and thus bonding – takes much longer. The bonding process usually continues until 12 months, sometimes even to two years after birth (Bell, 2001; Delmore-Ko et al., 2000; Mercer, 2004; Miller, 2003).

As there is no instrument that measures mother-child bonding up to one year postpartum, it makes sense to validate the PBQ for a longer period than the questionnaire intends to measure.

To our knowledge, little is known about mother-child bonding among mothers in Flanders (the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium). In Flanders, the PBQ has once been used at 8-12 weeks and 20-25 weeks postpartum, showing a reliable and valid indication of the early emotional tie between women and their children (van Bussel et al., 2010).

Using the PBQ up to one year postpartum will not only provide insight into what goes on between mother and child but will also provide an indication to further explore the mother’s emotional state of mind, as negative correlations were found between maternal postpartum emotional well-being and the total scores of the PBQ (van Bussel et al., 2009, 2010). To advocate its use among the general population of Flemish mothers, validation of the PBQ among a heterogeneous sample of mothers up to one year postpartum is necessary. In this study we investigated whether the PBQ is reliable and valid for use among a population of Flemish mothers up to one year postpartum.

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<sup>1</sup> The Maternal Attachment Inventory

<sup>2</sup> The Mother Infant Attachment Scale

<sup>3</sup> The Mother and Baby Interaction Scale

<sup>4</sup> The Maternal Postnatal Attachment Scale

<sup>5</sup> The Postpartum Bonding Questionnaire

<sup>6</sup> The Mother- to-Infant Bonding Scale

<sup>7</sup> The Mother- to-Infant Relations and Feelings Scale

<sup>8</sup> The Mothers’ Object Relations Scales-Short Form

# Methods

## Participants and sampling

We included Flemish women with a good comprehension of the Dutch language, 18 years or older, who had given birth at least six weeks but not longer than one year ago of a healthy baby. We excluded pregnant women, participants with children with congenital anomalies, severe pathology or life-threatening diseases requiring NICU, neonatology or pediatric admission. Participants who had recently given birth (up to six weeks postpartum) were excluded to avoid confounds with postpartum blues (Graham et al., 2002). We excluded mothers of an adopted child, as transition to motherhood in these cases is characterized by other unique emotions (Fontenot, 2007; Olsson et al., 2008).

We combined convenience and purposive sampling. Nurseries, primary schools, hospitals, playgrounds and breastfeeding cafés were informed about the study by e-mail and telephone and posters/flyers (including the link to study) were distributed to inform mothers about the study. Mothers were also directly approached in parks and indoor playgrounds and were invited to fill in the questionnaire, using tablets that were provided by the researchers. In addition, the announcement of the study and the invitation to participate, were distributed via social media platforms such as Facebook® and Instagram®, allowing snowballing. Data was collected from September 2018 to January 2019, using the Limesurvey® online survey tool.

The sample size was calculated using the subject-to-variable ratio of minimum 10:1 (Arrindell and J., 1985; Field, 2013; Kuncze et al., 1975; Marascuilo and Levin, 1983; Nunnally, 1978; Velicer and Fava, 1998; Zhao, 2009). This calculation showed that we needed a sample of a minimum of 250 participants (10 x 25 PBQ items), to allow meaningful statistical inferences.

## Instrument: Postpartum Bonding Questionnaire (PBQ)

The PBQ is designed to provide an indication of mother–infant relationship problems (Brockinton et al., 2001), containing 25 items, divided into four constructs: “*impaired bonding*”, “*rejecting & anger*”, “*anxiety about care*” and “*risk of abuse*”. We have used the Dutch version of the PBQ (originally in English), translated and validated by van Bussel et al. (2010). The items were scored on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 (always) to 5 (never). The cut-off value of impaired bonding is a total score of 26 or higher (46). The Dutch PBQ has shown good internal consistency on two separate occasions (8-12 weeks postpartum  $\alpha=0.87$ , 20-25 weeks postpartum  $\alpha=0.78$ ) (van Bussel et al., 2010).

## **Analysis**

We reversed the negative formulated questions (items 2-3-5-6-7-8-12-13-14-15-17-18-19-20-21-23-24). We calculated the total PBQ scores and identified the high scores using the cut-off value of  $\geq 26$ . We used descriptive statistics. Normality of distribution was assessed using visual interpretation of histograms and Q-Q plots. The internal consistency of the unidimensional scale was calculated using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ). A value of  $\alpha \geq 0.70$  was considered acceptable (Field, 2013). Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed to validate the PBQ. The sample size was tested with the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and the Barlett's test of sphericity. A KMO of  $\geq 0.80$  and a Barlett's test with a significance level of  $p < 0.05$  were considered acceptable (Field, 2013). EFA was performed using principal component analysis (PCA) with a varimax rotation. Unidimensional factor extraction was performed based on the Scree plot and Eigenvalues (Field, 2013). The factor loading of each item had to be at least 0.40 (Costello and Osborne, 2005; Field, 2013). Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to determine the goodness-of-fit of the unidimensional factor obtained with the EFA (Köberich and Farin, 2015). The model-of-fit was determined based on the Chi-square ( $X^2$ ), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC). We regarded  $CMIN/df \leq 3,00$ ,  $RMSEA \leq 0,08$ ,  $CFI \geq 0,90$  as an acceptable fit (Byrne, 2010; Schermelleh-Engell et al., 2003; van Geel and Verboon, 2015). The goodness-of-fit has been optimized by Modification Indices (MI). If the MI was  $> 20.00$ , covariances were applied (van Geel and Verboon, 2015). All statistical analyses were performed in SPSS version 25.0 and AMOS version 26.0.

## **Ethics**

The study was approved by the Ethical Advisory Committee on Social and Human Sciences of the University of Antwerp (EA SHW\_17\_40\_03). The questionnaire included a privacy note explaining confidentiality, anonymity and data handling. Participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained via box ticking before the questionnaire could be completed.

# Findings

## Participants

A total of 254 Flemish mothers were included in our analysis. There were no missing data. Most of our participants were born in Belgium, were in a relationship, had fairly high levels of education and 6% reported psychological problems. Sociodemographic details are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Sociodemographic details

	Mean	SD ( $\pm$ )	Range
Age mother (year)	29.67	3.87	21-43
	N	%	
Nullipara	143	56.30	
Multipara	111	44.70	
Ethnicity			
Belgian	238	93.70	
Western European	14	5.51	
Other	2	0.79	
Marital status			
Single/living apart together	16	6.30	
Living together	54	21.26	
Married	184	72.44	
Education level*			
Low	12	4.72	
Moderate	56	22.05	
High	122	48.03	
Academic	64	25.20	
Annual gross family income			
$\leq$ 33700 euro per annum	55	21.65	
$>$ 33700 per annum	135	53.15	
Unknown	64	25.20	
Current psychological problems			
No	238	93.70	
Yes	16	6.30	
Use of psychopharmaceuticals**	8/16	50.00	
Current physical problems			
No	209	82.28	
Yes	45	17.72	
PBQ scores			
PBQ scores above cut-off/ impaired bonding	13	5.12	

\*Low: elementary, pre-vocational secondary education; Moderate: secondary education preparing for higher education; High: Bachelor equivalent; Academic: master and university level

\*\* This is 8/16 or 50% of the population who answered 'yes' to the question of having psychological problems.



## **Validation PBQ**

### ***Construct validity***

First, EFA was performed. The KMO was 0.86 and the Bartlett's test was statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ). PCA and varimax rotation showed six factors with an Eigenvalue of  $\geq 1.00$ , with a total cumulative explanatory variance of 60.09% (table 2). The Eigenvalues are presented in figure 1, using a Scree plot. Despite the fact that six factors have an eigenvalue  $\geq 1.00$ , the inflection of the curve is observed at factor 2, showing a unidimensional factor that predominates the factor loadings. The one factor that was extracted, accounted for 30,12% of the total variance. Table 3 shows the factor load for each item for this unidimensional factor "Impaired bonding". Only items with a factor load of  $\geq 0.40$  were included. After removing four items (Q17-Q18-Q20-Q24), a subsequent PCA was performed with the 21-item version of the PBQ. The unidimensional factor "Impaired Bonding" had an Eigenvalue of 7.22 and explained 34.37% of the total variance.

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Table 2: Factor matrix of PBQ

	Factor load					
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
<b>Eigenvalue (% of variance)</b>	<b>7.53 (30.12%)</b>	<b>1.91 (7.62%)</b>	<b>1.65 (6.60%)</b>	<b>1.44 (5.76%)</b>	<b>1.37 (5.47%)</b>	<b>1.13 (4.51%)</b>
I feel close to my baby	<b>0.721</b>					
I wish the old days when I had no baby would come back	<b>0.610</b>					
I feel distant from my baby	<b>0.737</b>					
I love to cuddle my baby	<b>0.545</b>					
I regret having this baby	<b>0.658</b>					
The baby does not seem to be mine	<b>0.662</b>					
My baby winds me up	<b>0.614</b>					
My baby irritates me	<b>0.620</b>					
I feel happy when my baby smiles or laughs	<b>0.584</b>					
I love my baby to bits	<b>0.586</b>					
I enjoy playing with my baby	<b>0.619</b>					
My baby cries too much	0.460				<b>-0.600</b>	
I feel trapped as a mother	<b>0.616</b>					
I feel angry with my baby	<b>0.578</b>					
I resent my baby	<b>0.559</b>					
My baby is the most beautiful baby in the world	<b>0.608</b>					
I wish my baby would somehow go away	0.341			<b>-0.451</b>		
I have done harmful things to my baby	0.050					<b>0.497</b>
My baby makes me anxious	<b>0.498</b>					
I am afraid of my baby	0.378	<b>0.620</b>				
My baby annoys me	<b>0.450</b>					
I feel confident when changing my baby	<b>0.446</b>					
I feel the only solution is for someone else to look after my baby	<b>0.526</b>					
I feel like hurting my baby	0.350		<b>0.478</b>			

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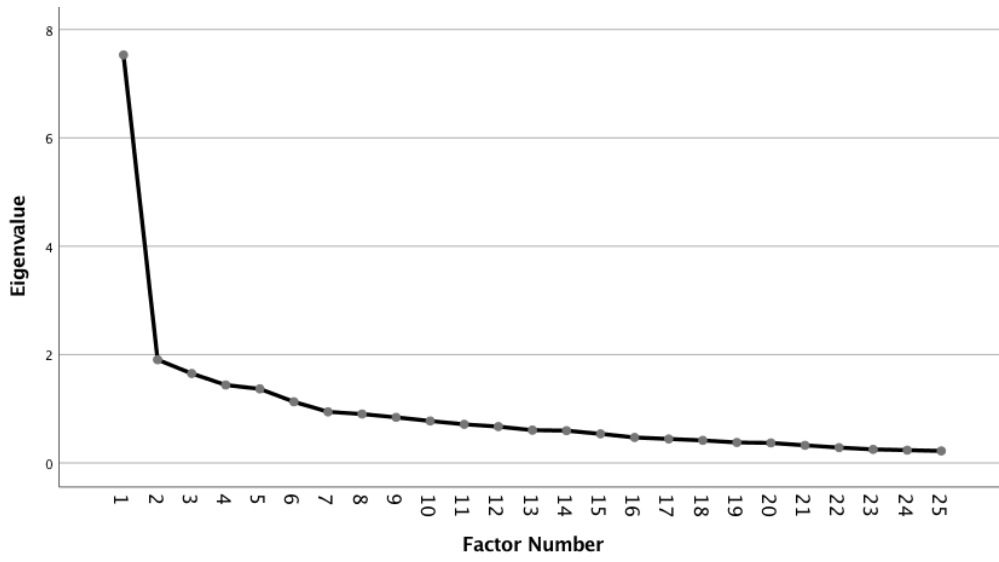


Figure 1: Scree plot

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Table 3: Factor load after extraction one factor "Impaired bonding"

N°	Item	Unidimensional factor "Impaired Bonding"
Q1	I feel close to my baby	0.721
Q2	I wish the old days when I had no baby would come back	0.610
Q3	I feel distant from my baby	0.737
Q4	I love to cuddle my baby	0.545
Q5	I regret having this baby	0.658
Q6	The baby does not seem to be mine	0.662
Q7	My baby winds me up	0.614
Q8	My baby irritates me	0.620
Q9	I feel happy when my baby smiles or laughs	0.584
Q10	I love my baby to bits	0.586
Q11	I enjoy playing with my baby	0.619
Q12	My baby cries too much	0.460
Q13	I feel trapped as a mother	0.616
Q14	I feel angry with my baby	0.578
Q15	I resent my baby	0.559
Q16	My baby is the most beautiful baby in the world	0.608
Q17	I wish my baby would somehow go away	0.341*
Q18	I have done harmful things to my baby	0.050*
Q19	My baby makes me anxious	0.498
Q20	I am afraid of my baby	0.378*
Q21	My baby annoys me	0.450
Q22	I feel confident when changing my baby	0.446
Q23	I feel the only solution is for someone else to look after my baby	0.526
Q24	I feel like hurting my baby	0.350*
Q25	My baby is easily comforted	0.427

**Eigenvalue is 7.22, accounting for 34.37% of the total variance**

\* Items with a factor load of <0.40 were excluded in the 21-item version of the PBQ

Second, CFA of the unidimensional 21-item version of the PBQ showed a model-of-fit representing a significant  $X^2(p<0.001)$ ,  $CMIN/df=3.92$ ,  $CFI=0.72$ ,  $RMSEA=0.11$  and  $AIC=824.07$ . Modification indices showed covariance between the error terms. After adjusting this covariance, an improved acceptable model-of-fit was obtained:  $X^2(p<0.001)$ ,  $CMIN/df=2.61$ ,  $CFI=0.85$ ,  $RMSEA=0.08$  and  $AIC=73.29$  (figure 2).

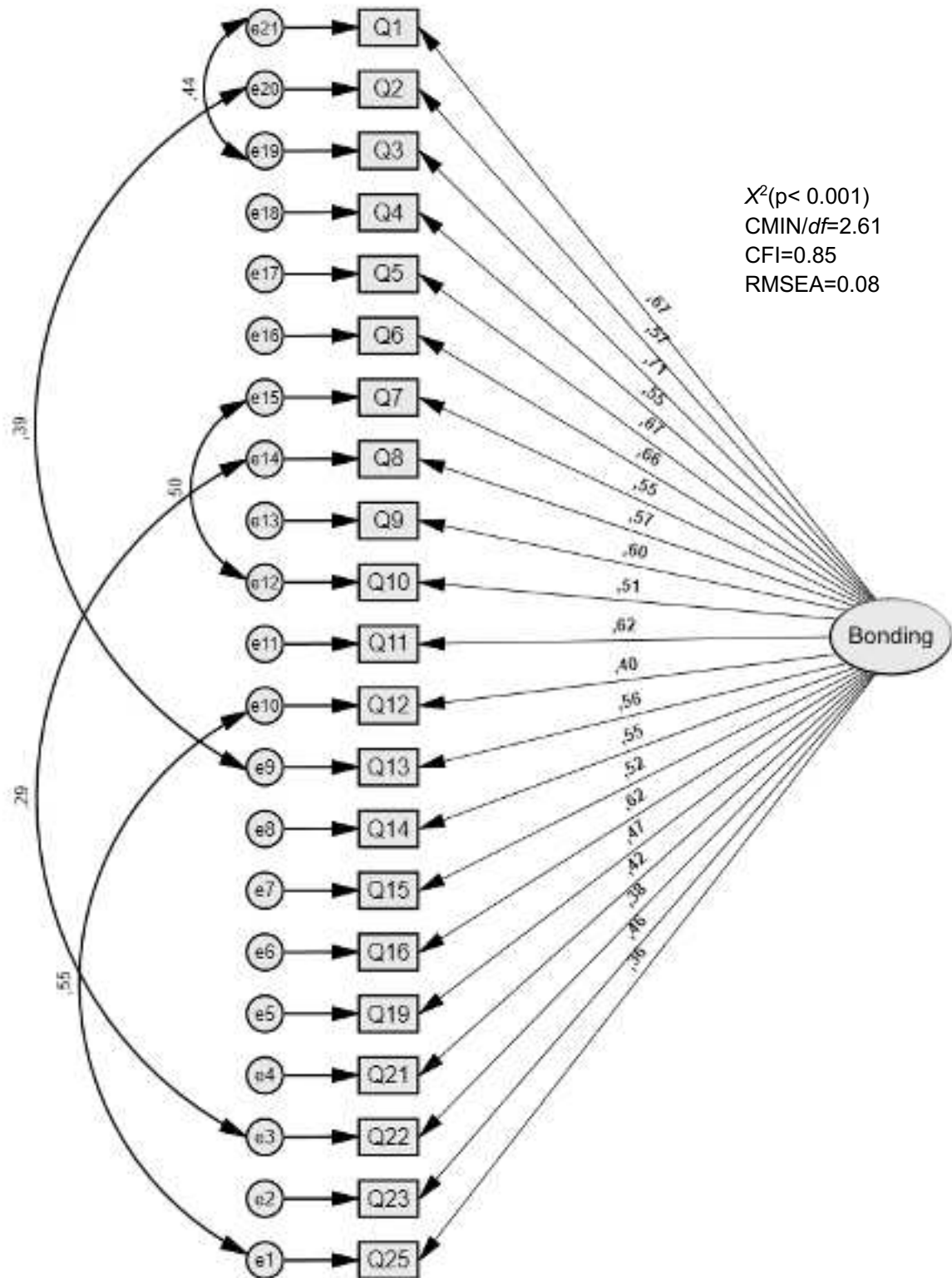


Figure 2: Model-of-fit using CFA

***Internal consistency***

The internal consistency for the original 25-item version was  $\alpha=0.886$  and for the original four factors: “impaired bonding”  $\alpha=0.822$ ; “rejecting and anger”  $\alpha=0.757$ ; “anxiety about care”  $\alpha=0.464$ ; “risk of abuse”  $\alpha=0.363$ . The internal consistency for the original 25-item version was  $\alpha=0.886$ . Our proposed one-factor model, consisted of 21 items, showed a good internal consistency ( $\alpha=0.887$ ).

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## Discussion

The current study represents the first Flemish investigation of mother–infant bonding based on a sample of postpartum women up to 12 months postpartum. The aim of this study was to examine the Flemish version of the PBQ. Our abbreviated 21-item PBQ showed acceptable validity and reliability in a population of Flemish mothers up to one year postpartum.

In our study one major factor remained: impaired bonding. This is not consistent with previous research among postpartum women where one, three or four factors were found (Kaneko and Honjo, 2014; Ohashi et al., 2016; Reck et al., 2006; Suetsugu et al., 2015; Wittkowski et al., 2010). A possible explanation for the differences in structure between our study and other studies might be the population characteristics. A number of studies included mothers with psychiatric morbidity (Brockinton et al., 2001; Wittkowski et al., 2007a), in contrast to this study, where only few women report to experiencing psychological problems.

In our study, only one factor “*impaired bonding*” remained while the other dimensions (“*impaired bonding*”, “*rejecting & angry*”, “*anxiety about care*” and “*risk of abuse*”) disappeared as constructs of bonding. The other dimensions of the original PBQ are more present in the early postpartum and seem more characteristic for the period of four to 12 weeks postpartum (Brockington et al., 2001). This suggests that feelings of anger, hostility and rejection become less prevalent when the process of (renewed) motherhood progresses during the first year after birth (van Bussel et al., 2009). This can be explained by the fact that emotions of anger and hostility are often associated with the physical condition and pain after birth (Graham et al., 2002). Moreover, at six or seven months of age, infants make active attempts to maintain contact with their parent and at one year of age the parent is a child’s base to turn to when it is hurt or sad - this mother-infant interaction are likely to positively influence maternal perceptions of bonding (Schroeder and Gordon, 2002; Waters and Cummings, 2000).

Mother-to-infant bonding is a continuous process that develops during pregnancy and can continue up to 12 months after birth for the process to be completed (Bell, 2001; Delmore-Ko et al., 2000; Mercer, 2004; Miller, 2003). An optimal bond between mother and child is essential for healthy development of the child.

We assumed an association between bonding and maternal emotional well-being during the first year postpartum (Cuijilts et al., 2019; Garcia-Esteve et al., 2016; Milgrom et al., 2011; van Bussel et al., 2009, 2010). In our study, 6% of the women self-reported psychological problems, considerably lower than the Flemish average of 20% (Kind & Gezin, 2018). Our findings suggest a possible underreport of reduced emotional well-being and thus impaired bonding. Because we based psychological problems on a single item, for future research, it is recommended to replace this self-report single item by a validated psychometric measure to establish more valid answers.



Previous studies have shown that mother-to-infant bonding is a process that starts during pregnancy and continues after birth (Bicking Kinsey and Hupcey, 2013; de Cock et al., 2016; O'Higgins et al., 2013; Rossen et al., 2019; Tichelman et al., 2019), underscoring the importance of fostering a healthy mother–infant bond as part of perinatal care supported by maternity healthcare professionals (Tichelman et al., 2019). Measuring in this period emphasizes that in addition to monitoring the mother-infant bonding during pregnancy and early postpartum, it is of importance to extend the period of monitoring, that is, up to 12 months postpartum. It would therefore be of interest to administer the PBQ in a longitudinal study using the 25-item PBQ early postpartum and, the 21-item PBQ at one year postpartum. This would provide the opportunity to better understand the process and progress of bonding within the timeframe of transition to motherhood, using the same construct.

A weak point of this study is the use of the word “baby” in the PBQ. In a population of mothers with children up to one year old, this could possibly result in questionnaire bias. By replacing the word “baby” with “child”, respondents might better recognize themselves in the PBQ items at a later stage during the postpartum period and a better model-of-fit in further research may be obtained.

We are aware that our sampling techniques might have introduced sampling and selection bias. The sample consists mainly of highly educated women, in paid employment and in a relationship. Although these characteristics reflect the general Flemish female population, our sample contains fewer people with a migration background and very likely underrepresented women with emotional health and well-being problems (Kind & Gezin, 2018; Van den Branden, 2019). Our sample contained a rather equal division of primi and multiparous women. It is known that multiparous women are more likely to report low feelings of bonding compared to women who have given birth to their first child (Cuijilts et al., 2019). Future research should therefore distinguish between primiparous and multiparous women, to confirm possible differences in bonding between first-time mothers and those experiencing renewed motherhood. It is possible this is caused by the recruiting participants in social spaces such as parks, playgrounds and cafés, given that low mental health affects social capacity (Posmontier and Waite, 2011), possibly resulting in the overrepresentation of emotional-well women. Because we also used social media as a recruiting strategy, it is possible we did not reach all eligible women. Future studies should also include a more heterogeneous population with including women with a migration background, lower levels of education and income, and women with reduced emotional well-being.

Unlike the 25-item PBQ, the 21-item version of the PBQ has no validated cut-off values. In order to be able to use the scale as a successful screening tool for disturbed bonding in the future, further research should be carried out to define validated cut-off values for the 21-item version.

## **Limitations**

The CFA showed that our model fits only moderately well with the current data. This may be due to our relatively small sample size and the use of a healthy population of mothers, that is, a sample of mothers with a low percentage of self-reported psychological problems, while the PBQ is originally developed and validated among women with psychiatric pathology (Brockington et al., 2006). Brockington (2011) claims that a sample of more than 1000 would be needed for validation, due to the infrequency of bonding disorders among mentally healthy women. Future quantitative research with a larger sample size would be of merit.

We have removed four items with a factor load of  $<0.40$ . This may explain the low cumulative explanatory power of our model, as especially items heavy with meaning were removed. We have thought about this very carefully but given our general population we have deliberately chosen to remove the four items. These items are more appropriate for a psychiatric population with possible impaired bonding (Brockington et al., 2006). We recommend using the 24-item version in a psychiatric population with suspected impaired bonding and to use the 21-item version in a general population of women up to one year postpartum. For example: Q18 "I have done harmful things to my baby", which had a very low factor load of 0.050, since 98.40% gave the same answer of "never". We do not know if or how these thought processes occurred among our participants. Future qualitative research would be of merit to better understand the interpretation of bonding throughout the process of transition to motherhood and represented by the PBQ in particular.

In addition, a possible response bias should be taken into account, with participants filling in socially desirable answers, as it is in general not socially accepted to not-to-bond with your child or have negative feelings towards your child (Reck et al., 2006). This could mean that our results are an underrepresentation of impaired bonding in the first-year postpartum. In an earlier study in a population of women who were 20-25 weeks postpartum, scores on the PBQ were correlated with scores on the Social Desirability Scale, showing a weak but significant correlation between these scores (van Bussel et al., 2010).

## **Conclusion**

After testing the Postpartum Bonding Questionnaire among a population of Flemish mothers up to one year postpartum, one dimension remained: "Impaired bonding", implying to play an important role during transition to motherhood out with the early postpartum period. The 21-item version of the PBQ is a valid and reliable tool to identify bonding in a general population of Flemish mothers up to one year postpartum opposed to the 24-item version. Further research is of merit.

## Declaration of interest statement

The authors report no conflict of interest.

## CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Roxanne Bleijenbergh:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing – original draft, Visualization. **Laura Van den Branden:** Investigation, Writing – review & editing. **Yannic van Gils:** Resources, Writing – review & editing. **Natacha Van de Craen:** Investigation, Writing – review & editing. **Luka Van Leugenhæge:** Writing – review & editing. **Yvonne J Kuipers:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision.

## Ethical Approval

The study was approved by the Ethical Advisory Committee on Social and Human Sciences of the University of Antwerp (EA SHW\_17\_40\_03).

## Funding

This work was financially supported by the Department of Economy, Science & Innovation of the Flemish Government [grant PWO-3100Q1003].

## Acknowledgments

No acknowledgments are stated.

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