

Maternal Depression and its Impact on Children and Families

Anabel Flaherty ARNP
Vera French Mental Health Center
Davenport, Iowa

Overview cont.

Women of childbearing age are high risk for depression

1. Social morbidity
2. Depressive symptoms go unnoticed
3. Particularly at risk in the first months post partum

Overview

Maternal depression-a risk factor for social and cognitive development of children.

Prevalence of depression in Western countries-6% 2-1 in females

Prevalence of postpartum depression-13%

Types of Postpartum. Depression, cont.

Postpartum psychosis

A severe disorder beginning within
four weeks postpartum with:

- Delusions
- Hallucinations
- Gross impairment in functioning

This is a psychiatric emergency!! There can be danger of
mother and/or infant.

Risk Factors

Women experiencing postpartum depressions
have a 50-62% risk of future depressions.

History of mood disorders

Depression during pregnancy

Family history

Negative life events-marital strife, drugs/alcohol, a
fragile infant, perceived lack of social support.

Consequences of maternal depression

Prenatal-inadequate prenatal care, poor
nutrition, higher preterm birth weight, pre-
eclampsia and spontaneous abortion,
premature birth.

Infant-behavioral, anger and a protective
style of coping, passivity, withdrawal and
dysregulated attention and arousal, sleep
disturbance.

Role of Father

Understudied.

Emphasis is still on the mother.

Children of depressed mothers interacted better with non-depressed fathers.

Poorer performance if both parents are depressed.

Characteristics of the Children

Boys may be more vulnerable

Temperament makes a difference

Children respond positively to support from other adults

Treatment Options

Pharmacology- should be considered in women who have moderate to severe depressions that have not responded to non-pharmacological interventions.

Studies to date have shown little evidence of fetal abnormalities or neurodevelopmental problems.

Trigger questions

Ask these questions on a one to one basis always being alert for the patient's verbal and non-verbal responses.

How are you feeling about being a new mother?

Are you enjoying your baby?

Trigger questions cont.

Do you find that your baby is easy or difficult to care for?

How are things going in your family?

Are you getting enough rest?

How is your appetite?

Trigger questions cont.

During the past month, have you often been bothered by feeling down, depressed or hopeless?

During the past month, have you often been bothered by having little interest or pleasure in doing things?

Recommendations:

Health care professional have an opportunity to stay alert to the signs of mother-child interaction difficulties, behavioral and developmental problems in the child and be alert for maternal depression, ask screening questions and make an referral for mental health services.

Recommendations, cont.

Mothers who take antidepressant medication during pregnancy should be reassured that much of the evidence, to date, shows that there is no increased risk of fetal anomalies.

Mothers who take antidepressant medication during pregnancy should be reassured about the neuro-development of the child as long-term studies have not shown adverse effects, except for subtle differences whose clinical significance has not been confirmed.

Recommendations, cont.

Mothers who have taken antidepressants during lactation should be reassured that much of the evidence to date show that there are no neurological or developmental abnormalities in children exposed to such medication through breast milk.

Mothers should be told that data on St. John's Wort are scarce and that such herbal remedies should not be taken during pregnancy and lactation.

Identifying Postpartum Depression

SCREENING QUESTIONS

How are you feeling about being a new mother?

Are you enjoying your baby?

Do you find that your baby is easy or difficult to care for?

How are things going in your family?

Are you getting enough rest?

How is your appetite?

During the past month, have you often been bothered by feeling down, depressed or hopeless?

During the last month, have you often been bothered by having little interest or pleasure in doing things?