POSTNATAL DEPRESSION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES IN PUBLIC HEALTH

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Summary

In conclusion, postnatally depressed fathers and/or mothers go through silent suffering. Hence, postnatal depression not only increases the global burden of depression but also affects physical, social and emotional health of the family. As a result of that, it becomes a major public health issue. There are risks of developmental delay of the children whose one parent is depressed and the risk increases when both parents are depressed. The negative effect of parental depression on the family as well as treatment and prevention. The consideration of postnatal depression of mothers as well as fathers is an important next step in research, practice and policy involving childbearing families.
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Key words: postnatal depression, public health

Introduction

Postnatal depression (PND) is a common psychological illness after child birth. Symptomatically, PND is not different from depression. Both partners may be affected by PND after childbirth but much attention has been paid to maternal depression. 10 to 15% of mothers and 4 to 10% of fathers suffer from postnatal depression [1–5]. An episode of mild to severe depression markedly shows within first 4 weeks to one year after child birth [6, 7]. Women experience physiological and emotional stresses during childbirth. Along with these, the role and identity are changed for the women which act as precipitant to depression. In the same way fathers develop postnatal depression which is closely associated with maternal PND [8]. Postnatal depression not only affects new mother’s and father’s health but also affects family’s health and wellbeing. The high incidence and consequences of PND are indicating more attention towards PND in the public health context.

What is postnatal depression?

Postnatal depression refers to non-psychotic depressive episode that develops after childbirth. The clinical manifestation is similar to depressive disorders. The features are described as less interest and pleasure in almost all activities; significant weight loss or weight gain or loss of appetite; sleep alteration; psychomotor agitation; feeling fatigue most of the time; sense of guilty and worthlessness; diminished ability to thinking, decision making and concentrating; and suicidal thoughts [6].

Often, an individual experiences irritability and tearfulness. Due to increased responsibilities, women often develop fear about their ability to cope with their babies [9]. As a result anxiety and phobia are typically seen in PND.

What are the risk factors of PND?

The basis of postnatal depression is complex. The leading etiological factor is of social nature [7, 9]. However, there is little evidence for genetic factors [9]. A meta-analysis includes the following risk factors: previous history of depression, depression during prenatal stage, poor social support during and after pregnancy, poor relation with partner, severe baby blues, and adverse circumstances after child birth [10]. The other risk factors are related to older age, negative response from her own mother in childhood, previous postnatal psychosis, and other psychosocial stressor [9, 11, 12]. Depression may be influenced by mixed feelings towards pregnancy, single mother, and unwanted pregnancy [9, 12]. There are weaker associations with a past history of abuse, lower socio-economic conditions, and poor experiences during child birth [7, 9]. After child birth, alteration of oestrogen and progesterone suggests a possible risk factor for PND but there is no evidence of hormonal association in PND [7].

Paternal risk factors are highly associated with maternal depression [8]. Fathers whose partners have depression are 2.5 times higher at risk of PND [13]. In a study it is revealed that 24 to 50% of men whose partners were depressed also suffered depression during first year after childbirth [14]. Other than this, men are at risk of PND when they experience a lack of sleep, fatigue, complications of pregnancy, poor social support, marital instability, lifestyle changes, recent negative life events, and feelings of incompetence in parenting role [15]. First time father and infant irritability also act as risk factors for paternal PND [15].

What are effects of PND?

In child bearing years, new mothers and fathers are vulnerable to develop depression which has adverse