

Fathers Can Become Depressed Around the Time of Pregnancy Too

By Joe Kotsch, Perinatal Consultant

Many health care practitioners have become familiar with the concept of women who experience mood disorders including depression in the postpartum period. A study reported in the *Journal of the American Medical Association's* May edition, found an overall meta-estimate of 10.4 percent of paternal depression between the first trimester and one year postpartum. They noted the highest paternal postpartum depression rates were during the period of three to six months postpartum (25.6 percent).

National data estimates the prevalence of depression in men in the general population at 4.8 percent. This data seems to indicate a need to look at the issue of postpartum depression in fathers a little closer.

In studies, maternal depression generally ranges from 10 percent to 30 percent. It is known that maternal depression can and often does lead to negative family and child development outcomes. Are maternal and paternal postpartum depression associated with one another? According to this meta-analysis, the study authors showed a moderate, positive association between postpartum depression in men and women.

As one parent's postpartum depression went up, so did that of the other. Most of the parents in the study were first time parents, including a sample of 28,004 fathers over 18 years of age. It could be the mother's depression is leading the way or vice versa. Sometimes there is a difference between families on how depression exhibits and how one copes with it. On the other hand, there may be other variables involved such as the child's personality and general temperament, crying



episodes, colic or perhaps other health-related concerns of either parent and/or child.

It seems evident there is a need for studies designed to look more closely at what happens during the postpartum period with regard to families and family dynamics. In particular, studies taking a closer look at how men experience becoming new fathers.

It would seem reasonable that improvements in screening and referral need more focus, since paternal depression may add to the negative effects of maternal depression on the emotional and behavioral development as well as on the overall development of children. It should be noted that more studies on the effects of paternal depression on child development need to be undertaken.

The authors further suggest that a family-focused versus a mother-focused approach may become necessary, but might be difficult to attain in order to address the depression of both partners. Fathers commonly express their depression as irritability, anger and withdrawal.

Clinicians should be educated that prenatal and postpartum depression can be experienced by men and to be screening for depression in the male partner if it is found during screening for the mother.

The article may be found in: James F. Paulson; Sharnail D. Bazemore Prenatal and Postpartum Depression in Fathers and Its Association With Maternal Depression: A Meta-analysis. *JAMA*. 2010;303(19):1961-1969.

Preterm Birth More Likely in Women Who Were Born Preterm

By Joe Kotsch, Perinatal Consultant

From a study of women who were born too early and their birth experiences, a group of Scottish researchers found that this group of “preterm” women was more likely to give birth prematurely than women who were born full term. The researchers found that women who were born full term but had one or more siblings who were born preterm, were more likely to give birth preterm as well. In other words, they found that a personal or family history of having been born preterm leads to a greater likelihood of a woman delivering preterm.

This study defined preterm birth as those births occurring between 24 and 37 weeks of gestation. The researchers looked at more than 22,000 births over a 60 year time period and found that among women who were born preterm and who were primiparas (first-time pregnancies) and having singleton births were 60 percent more

likely to deliver preterm. The percent of women born preterm in subsequent pregnancies dropped to about 50 percent.

Although this study validates previous research, the researchers state that the results may not transfer to other populations, since this study was conducted on a homogeneous population of women. Women who know they were born preterm should let their obstetrician have this information when making decisions to schedule additional prenatal visits or to consider other special treatment regimens.



The article may be found in: Bhattacharya, Sohinee; Amalraj Raja, Edwin; Ruiz Mirazo, Eider; Campbell, Doris M.; Lee, Amanda J.; Norman, Jane E.; Bhattacharya, Siladitya, *Inherited Predisposition to Spontaneous Preterm Delivery*. *Obstetrics & Gynecology*. 115(6):1125-1133, June 2010.