

Editorial

Interventions during pregnancy to lower the chances of postnatal depression among women from the Asian subcontinent

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ABSTRACT

Postnatal depression (PND) is a major psychiatric challenge to women's mental health worldwide. Particularly speaking of the Asian subcontinent i.e. India and Pakistan (Indo-Pak), many women suffer through PND but remain undiagnosed, which may be due to lack of knowledge and awareness about alteration in mood and thoughts during pregnancy and after delivery. Certain factors like low socio-economic status, a history of marital violence and depression entail a higher risk of PND. In addition, one factor which remains neglected is the husband's knowledge about PND and his

behaviour toward the woman suffering from PND. The husband's poor knowledge of PND and his attitude toward the mother play a vital role in the initiation of PND. Pre-delivery interventions focusing on a couple's knowledge of PND, the couple's mutual understanding /relationship and identification of the potential stressors for a depressive episode may be one way to reduce the incidence of PND among both women and men.

Keywords: Asian subcontinent, postnatal depression, pre-delivery interventions

Postnatal depression (PND) is one of the common psychiatric problems faced by women worldwide. Although in developed countries women may be able to recognise PND in time, in progressing Asian nations like India and Pakistan (Indo-Pak) many suffer from PND but remain undiagnosed, which may be due to lack of knowledge and awareness about alteration in mood and thoughts during pregnancy and after delivery. It has been found that those women reporting low socio-economic status, a history of marital violence and depression are seen to be at higher risk of PND.¹ In addition, marriage at an age younger than 18 and a poor relationship with their partner are the other factors that aggravate this situation among new mothers.² In spite of all these risk factors, other realities that remain neglected are the husband's knowledge about PND and his behaviour toward the women suffering from PND.³ The findings of Khan *et al* have revealed that a husband's

poor knowledge of PND and his attitude toward the mother play a vital role in the initiation of PND.³

In addition to this, the possibility of depression among new fathers may be another factor that could result in the development of symptoms of PND among the delivering mothers. Globally it appears that men are always seen as a symbol of physical and emotional strength. These physical and emotional qualities act as the main barriers preventing the depressed men from seeking professional help and advice.^{4,5} In other words, one can assume that men are more likely to pretend that after becoming a parent there are no changes in their mood or psychological state of mind. New fathers are often found to be reluctant to admit that they are suffering from PND.^{4,5} However, new mothers are found sharing their thoughts to release the pain, while men compensate by spending more time at pubs or bars and talking about other matters.⁶

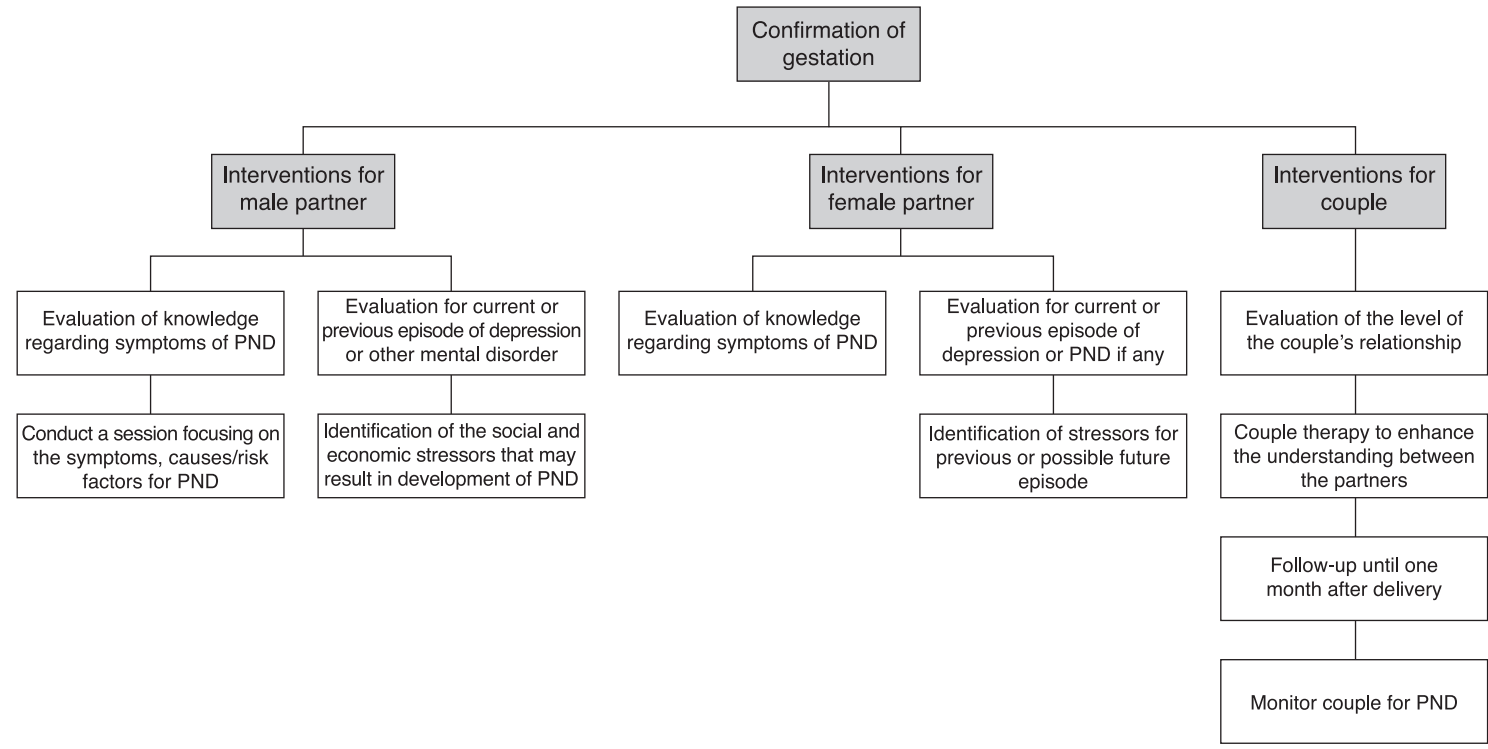


Figure 1 Pre-delivery interventions to decrease the incidence of postnatal depression

It is commonly believed that only women suffer from PND, and it may be because of this culture that the majority of men are hesitant to speak out.⁵ Facts prove that on average one in 14 fathers suffer from PND, this estimate being formed on the basis of reported cases. The incidence may be even higher than this, but underreporting is the main challenge when depicting the incidence of PND among men.^{5,6} The possible causes that are identified for the incidence of PND among men are first-time parenting, lack of social support or a limited circle of friends, lack of education about PND, poor socio-economic status and concurrent stressful life events.^{3,4} In addition, on the one hand fatherhood adds responsibility and on the other it changes the man's role in the family, which may aggravate the situation further.^{3,4} If the father suffers from PND, the mother is also certainly at risk of developing PND. According to Kleinman, a stressed father can further exaggerate a mother's compromised mental health.⁷

In spite of the high incidence of PND no interventions are planned to diminish or reduce its occurrence. Pre-delivery interventions focusing on the couple may be something that can be helpful in this regard. A set of such pre-delivery interventions are illustrated in Figure 1, though these are not yet validated. However, it may be opportune for the mental health specialist to test the applicability of these interventions, possibly resulting in a decrease in the incidence of PND among both women and men.

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