

Abstract

Postnatal depression is a common and serious disorder of childbirth. It affects 10 to 15% of recently delivered women. Apart from inflicting distress to the mother at time of anticipated joy, postnatal depression causes a host of deplorable complications to the mother, the family and the children. Until recently, there has been no coherent attention paid to this area of health care in Hong Kong and there is no data on the scope of the problem. This study set out to estimate the prevalence of postnatal depression at six weeks post-partum and to validate the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS), a 10-item self-report questionnaire design to screen for postnatal depressive illness. The study also attempted to elucidate risk factors of depression among recently delivered Chinese women in Hong Kong.

One hundred forty-five women were recruited after delivery and assessed six-week post-partum. At baseline assessment, socio-demographic data and status of putative risk factors were collected. Six weeks afterward, the participants completed the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale, the Beck Depression Inventory and the General Health Questionnaire. Following which, they were assessed by the author using the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-III-R to establish psychiatric diagnosis.

Among the participants who were interviewed at six-week assessment, 12% were diagnosed postnatal depression. The Chinese EPDS had good validity and reliability, with sensitivity of 82%, specificity of 86%, positive predictive value of 44% and negative predictive value of 97%. A cut-off score of 9/10 is desired, instead of the conventional 12/13. Risk factor analysis showed that both

internal personal vulnerability and external environmental stressors were responsible for depression in puerperium. Neuroticism, past history of depression, concurrent life event, and socio-economic poverty were significant explanatory variables in the linear regression and logistic regression models of postnatal depression.

There are several major contributions of this study. The prevalence figure shows that postnatal depression is more common than previously imagined. If 12% of recently delivered women suffer postnatal depression, 7,200 local women are affected each year, equivalent to 20 new cases per day. This service needs estimate has prompted severe^{al} district general hospitals in Hong Kong to take a more proactive approach in tackling postnatal depression. Recently, two systematic screening programmes have been set up in Hong Kong, using the Chinese EPDS as screening tool. On the research front, the Chinese EPDS has also been quickly taken up as a standard rating scale for perinatal mental health research in Hong Kong, Mainland China, Macau and Taiwan.