Fathers: their psychosocial and support needs in pregnancy and after birth

Philip Boyce

Sydney Medical School – Western

University of Sydney
Men and becoming a father

- Changing role for men
  - Expectations of involvement
- Stress and fatherhood
- Men and ‘postnatal’ depression
- Coping with a partner with postnatal depression
Changing role

- Expectation of men to become involved
- Lack of role models
  - Disengaged fathers
  - Competing role models – machismo
- Lack of symbolism
  - No baby showers
- Managing competing roles
  - Work – life balance
  - Financial pressure
Fathers being present at the birth

- Unfamiliar territory
  - Powerless
  - Seeing blood / medical procedures

- Helplessness
  - Having to observe pain
  - Not able to ‘do’ things

- Feelings of guilt

- Potential threat to life –
  - Acute stress disorder

- Limited opportunities to debrief
Changing role

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  - Financial pressure
Changing roles
The perinatal period - impact on men

- Psychosocial stresses for men during the transition to parenthood
  - Role change
  - Change in intimate relationship - from two to three person relationship
    - Jealously, rejection etc
    - Reallocation of household responsibilities
  - Providing care to the infant & separation anxiety
  - Work stresses - financial pressure
  - Change in social networks
  - Loss of independence
Depression in new fathers

- High rates of psychological morbidity among partners of women with PND
- Postnatal depression is predominantly psychosocial in origin
- Men will be confronted with similar psychosocial stresses to women
- Theoretically expect that there would be an increase in depression/anxiety on the transition to fatherhood
The First-Time Fathers Study: a prospective study of the mental health and wellbeing of men during the transition to parenthood

John T. Condon, Philip Boyce, Carolyn J. Corkindale

*Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 2004; 38:56–64

- Longitudinal prospective study of 312 first-time fathers
- Participants recruited when the women were pregnant
- Assessed the mental health, well-being and lifestyle of men in pregnancy and at 3, 6 and 12 months postpartum
Adjustment of men to transition to fatherhood

- If the psychosocial model holds, then men should experience high level of distress* manifest as:
  - Increase in levels of depression
  - High rates of ‘depression’ equivalent behaviours
    - Increased substance misuse
    - Increased violence
    - Acting out
    - Excessive working

*For the majority of men there will be an improvement in wellbeing and role fulfillment
Men and psychological distress over perinatal period

- No increase in psychological distress postpartum
- *Men don’t get ‘postnatal’ depression*
- Overall improvement in psychological symptoms over perinatal period
- Highest level of distress during pregnancy
General Health Questionnaire

Cut-off score > 5

Non-cases 285 (82%)
Cases 63 (18%)
Distressed fathers

The ‘cases’ identified during pregnancy were characterised by:

- High levels of psychological symptoms
- High alcohol use
- Marital dissatisfaction
- Poor social support
- Immature ego defences
- Poor knowledge / expectations of labour.
Men’s distress, knowledge and planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cases</th>
<th>Non-cases</th>
<th>OR</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unplanned pregnancy</td>
<td>50.9%</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclear birth expectations</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative folklore</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>3.8</td>
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</table>
Distressed men and PND

- The women in this study completed the EPDS at 3, 6 and 12 months postpartum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cases of PND (EPDS &gt; 12)</th>
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<tr>
<td>3 months postpartum             5.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 months postpartum             5.0%</td>
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EPDS scores in the women

![Bar chart showing EPDS scores in women across 3, 6, and 2 months. The chart compares non-cases (orange) and cases (red).]
Risk of postnatal depression over the first six months postpartum and the men's’ attitudes towards pregnancy and childbirth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Factor</th>
<th>OR</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative attitude to birth</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>0.21-13.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative expectations of birth</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>1.51-9.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little/no information about birth</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>1.55-10.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little/no perceived advantages of breastfeeding</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>0.96-5.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prenatal Questionnaire total</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>1.15-6.41</td>
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</table>
Regression Analysis

- Stepwise multiple regression with EPDS total at 3 months as the dependent variable

- Final model:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humour</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>-2.41</td>
<td>&lt;.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projection</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>&lt;.05</td>
</tr>
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- F(136,2) = 6.91, p<.001, R^2 = .09
Men’s contribution to PND

- Perceived marital disharmony by the men is associated with postnatal depression in their partners.

- Postnatal depression is associated with women whose partners have negative attitudes towards childbirth and insufficient information.

- Postnatal depression is associated with women whose partners use immature defenses.

- In a regression analysis postnatal depressive symptoms is associated with ego defenses characterised by low sense of humour and projection.

- Antenatal prevention of postnatal depression need to take into account the role of a woman’s partner in addition to her own risk factors.
Relationships in perinatal period

- Relationship difficulties are a major risk factor for PND
- Depression maintained by relationship difficulties
- When depression arises without significant psychosocial risk
  - Increase in problems with relationship
  - The relationship becomes collateral damage
Collateral damage and postpartum depression

**Woman**
- Symptoms of depression
  - Withdrawn
  - Demanding
  - Irritable
  - Resentful
- Managing family / household
- Loss of support

**Partner**
- Response to symptoms
  - Confusion - bewilderment
  - Withdrawal
  - flight into work
  - Anger
  - Alcohol / drugs
  - Resentment
- Family / household demands
- Work – financial pressure
- Lack of supports
The perinatal period is stressful for men.

The stress can have a negative impact on men.

...and affect the way his partner copes.

When women have PND it can have an impact on the man & their relationship.

Attending to the men’s needs is important in the comprehensive management of perinatal disorders.

...and lead to well adapted fathers necessary for a child’s development.
Thank you for your attention

Questions?