

The Experience of Men Whose Partners Have Postpartum Depression: Summary

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Paternal depression occurs when their partner has maternal postpartum depression and fathers are experiencing feelings of helplessness, anger, frustration, and a lack of support. The Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale that is typically used for women, has been shown to also be useful to men. The focus is usually on the women, but paternal depression can have lasting effects on their partners and their children. Men whose partners have PPD tend to seek out more negative coping behaviors such as violence, substance use, and avoidance. This study set out to bridge the gap of knowledge of how maternal PPD effects fathers.

In this study men whose partners had been diagnosed with PPD within the last 3 years were asked to have a sit-down interview for about an hour. Some men in the sample had a co-occurring mental illness but most did not. The study pointed out five overarching themes that these men concluded to during the interview. The first one was providing support, in effort to provide their partner with more support they often struggled with upkeeping their own. While trying to make sure the household duties were met, many still had jobs, and it was hard to balance all the responsibilities they took on. The second theme was maintaining stability, especially when their partners expressed thoughts of harm. Many used negative coping mechanisms to deal with not being able to gain control. The third theme was mutuality, they started to experience symptoms. These symptoms were their own depression, being anxious, or not being able to eat, or eating too much. Even though postpartum depression is a “women’s disorder” these men were mirroring the symptoms their partners were expressing. Theme four was isolation, they felt as they had nowhere to go to express their feelings. These men felt like they did not have a support system to reach out to. Theme five is insight, men that participated in this wanted others to be aware that this is an issue, and it may happen to you. In order to receive

the support that they made need ahead of time. Overall, this study shows that maternal PPD can affect men too. We need to make sure we are educating about it, and how to spot it, and where to go for resources when they need help.