

Reviewer's report

Title: Risk factors for antenatal depression, postnatal depression and parenting stress

Version: 2 Date: 3 January 2008

Reviewer: Catherine McMahon McMahon

Reviewer's report:

Is the work posed by the authors new and well defined?

This paper seeks to identify predictors of antenatal depression, postnatal depression, parenting stress and relations among them. The results confirm that antenatal depression is both easily identified and a strong risk factor for postnatal depression and suggest that postnatal depression is a risk factor (or correlate of) parenting stress. These findings further support the current public health emphasis on identifying women at risk of perinatal depression during pregnancy and are suitable for publication. The major limitation of the study concerns the lack of adequate definition and discussion of the construct of parenting stress.

The authors acknowledge that much work has already been done on predictors of postpartum depression and argue that less is known about predictors of antenatal depression and parenting stress. Since so much has been written already, as the authors acknowledge, a fresh approach is needed.

Introduction

Discretionary Revisions

1. For example a discussion of the extent to which the predictors of postnatal and antenatal depression are different from or similar to predictors of depression (more generally) in adult women would be appropriate. It seems that certain obstetric factors may be important here, but that other risk factors may be directly comparable. In a related vein there is no detailed consideration of attachment styles or caretaking history as risk factors for antenatal or postnatal depression (or, indeed, for parenting stress).

2. The statements in the literature review regarding the impact of postnatal depression on child outcomes require some qualifications. Given the number of socio-demographic risk factors noted for postnatal depression, the authors should qualify their statements about the impact of PND on offspring, by noting that studies differ regarding the impact on children, that the impact is greater when depression is chronic and severe and often quite modest in high SES samples.

Minor Essential Revision.

1. Inclusion of history of abuse as a risk factor is noted, but perhaps a broader consideration of harsh, rejecting parenting or parenting lacking in warmth (which

may not reach the level of abuse) may have been useful. This should be acknowledged as a limitation of the study in the discussion. While much of the influential work from this perspective has concerned depression in adult women more generally, findings have been replicated among postnatally depressed women, and may be particularly important with respect to parenting problems (and parenting stress) postnatally. In particular, more recent work by Bifulco and colleagues assessing attachment style as a predictor of both antenatal and postnatal depression (British Journal of Psychiatry, 2003) should be cited. Also work by Judith Feeney and colleagues.

2. The attributional style questionnaire is included, but no rationale is provided: there is no reference in the literature review to attributional style as a risk factor for antenatal or postnatal depression.

Major Compulsory Revision

1. The most important area requiring attention in the introduction is the section on parenting stress. The construct is not defined - this is very important as the widely used measure (Parenting Stress Index (PSI) and hence the construct consists of factors including depression, maternal health, difficult child and difficult parent-child interaction. Clearly there is quite a lot of overlap with depression which needs to be acknowledged. Further it is not clear that the literature cited relating to risk factors for parenting stress includes papers that have used the validated measure of this construct, rather than more general papers on parenting difficulties. A recent paper directly examining relations between parenting stress and postnatal depression may be of relevance (Cornish et al., 2006, Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology). Very general statements are made about "severe parenting difficulties" which are not necessarily the same as parenting stress (as measured by the PSI). The sentence "Women with severe parenting difficulties including sexual abuse have reported feeling less confident and less control as parents" needs clarification "is the sexual abuse a cause of the parenting difficulties (in the history of the mother) or an index of them?".

Methods

Minor Essential Revision

1. The description of the PSI (the major outcome measure) is inadequate. See previous comments regarding the introduction. The factor structure of the measure should be provided as well as sample items. Presumably the total score was used. However this total includes a depression factor.

Results:

Discretionary Revisions

1. Descriptions of sample "more information should be provided on ethnicity" for example how many women were raised in non-english speaking households?

2. While the point prevalence data on postnatal depression and anxiety are of

interest, they do not relate to the research questions addressed by the study. If they are to be included, they should be included as descriptive data at the beginning of the results section.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Please provide clarification regarding whether antenatal depression and postnatal depression and antenatal anxiety were entered in the models as dichotomous (above or below 12.5 on BDI) or continuous dependent and predictor variables.
2. Assuming the dependent variables were dichotomous using the threshold scores, I would like to see the results for the regression models when the higher BDI score (16.5) is used rather than 12.5. (I think it important that both results be reported).
3. I would also like to see an additional analysis which explores whether PND predicts Parenting Stress if the depression scale items are excluded from the PSI and also a breakdown and more descriptive data regarding which aspects of parenting stress are predicted by postnatal depression.

Discussion

Minor Essential Revisions

1. Limitations regarding concurrent reporting and pervasive negative reporting are appropriately acknowledged. However, the overlap between the constructs of PND and Parenting Stress is not discussed. This will be facilitated by providing the initial analyses recommended in the results section above.
2. As noted in the introduction, it is a limitation of the study that attachment styles or a measure of recalled caregiving quality during childhood were not included. This should be acknowledged.

What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable