Reviewer’s report

Title: Anxiety and Stress in the Postpartum: Is there more to postnatal distress than depression?

Version: 1 Date: 9 December 2005

Reviewer: Vivette Glover

Reviewer’s report:

General
In this study, the authors screened 325 primiparous women attending mothers’ groups between 6 weeks to 6 months post partum, with the EPDS and DASS-21 self rating questionnaires. The authors’ argument that there is more to postnatal distress than postnatal depression, and that anxiety and stress should be considered also is an important one. The comparison of EPDS results and DASS results obtained from the same people is of interest.

However, the data collection is described as convenience sampling, and that was from mothers’ groups. This suggests that it is not a consecutive group of participants and we do not know how representative this sample is for postnatal women in Australia. Indeed the authors state that a high proportion had tertiary education. The women who have not participated in data collection, even from the groups, are not described. This is a weakness of the study.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
1. The paper is very wordy for its content and could benefit with being considerably shortened.
2. Some of the relevant literature has not been reviewed. For example both Brouwers EP, van Baar AL, Pop VJ.(2001) and Ross LE, Gilbert Evans SE, Sellers EM, Romach MK(2003) have discussed the extent to which the EPDS measures anxiety, and this should be addressed.
3. Abstract. Second sentence. The EPDS is never claimed to be a diagnostic benchmark-it is a screening tool, which can be followed with a diagnostic interview for a diagnosis. This should be changed.
4. Results. Second sentence. States that 33 women were anxious/and or stressed without depression. Should state that they showed symptoms of anxiety or stress.
5. P19 First sentence. “The EPDS failed to identify ..10 women who had mild symptoms of depression..” makes it sound as though the DASS-21 has more validity. What is shown is a discrepancy between the results with the two scales with no information about which would more closely correspond with other diagnostic measures. This needs to be changed
6. The weaknesses of the study should be discussed more fully and critically
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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

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Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)
What next?: Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:
'I declare that I have no competing interests'