

APA Official Actions

Position Statement on Screening and Treatment of Mood and Anxiety Disorders During Pregnancy and Postpartum

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“Policy documents are approved by the APA Assembly and Board of Trustees. . . These are . . . position statements that define APA official policy on specific subjects. . .” – *APA Operations Manual*

Issue: Mood and/or anxiety disorders in the antenatal and postnatal periods is high in the United States and has become a serious public health problem; among women and other persons who are pregnant or postpartum, 1 out of 7–10 who are pregnant and 1 out of 5–8 who are postpartum will develop a depressive and/or anxiety disorder, and 1 out of 1,000 will develop a psychotic disorder. The incidence of these disorders is highest among those with a history or family history of depression, with few social supports, with concurrent substance abuse, domestic violence, and/or with a low socioeconomic status. Although depressive disorders are among the most common, emerging evidence suggests the need for a more comprehensive conceptualization of perinatal psychiatric illness which includes bipolar disorder and common comorbid illnesses such as generalized anxiety disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, and panic disorder. Many studies have shown that major depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) during pregnancy are associated with decreased prenatal care and adverse perinatal outcomes such as earlier birth and low birth weight. Perinatal mental health disorders can be severe; maternal suicide is on par with infection as the leading cause of maternal mortality, and approximately 300 infanticides occur in the United States each year. Untreated postpartum mood disorders have been associated with impairments in cognitive, behavioral, and emotional development in the offspring during childhood and adolescence. Only a minority of clinicians involved with the pre- and postpartum care of women and other persons who are pregnant or postpartum are currently using validated screening tools to detect these disorders. Despite the availability of evidence-based treatments, most pregnant and postpartum women and other persons who are pregnant or postpartum with these disorders do not receive adequate treatment. To improve obstetric outcomes and maternal health, achieve optimal child development, and reduce the numbers of maternal and infant deaths, it is imperative that the APA take the lead in prioritizing education and research about these disorders, as well as their screening, diagnosis, and treatment.

APA Position:

It is the position of the APA that perinatal patients should receive mental health screening and assessment. Treatment and support, which include addressing social determinants of health, domestic violence and systemic stressors, should be provided when needed. Current knowledge

regarding the evidence-based approaches to the treatment of patients who are pregnant and postpartum, including the risks of no treatment or under treatment, should be widely disseminated.

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