

Expectant dads get depressed too

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Credit: George Hodan/public domain

Transition to parenthood can be a difficult life event. It can have an impact on both parents and on the long-term development of the child. While mother's "baby blues" have been widely investigated, little research has been conducted on antenatal paternal depression. A team from the Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre (RI-MUHC) sheds light on fathers' mental health by releasing the first study to report the prevalence of antenatal depression symptoms among Canadian men. The findings, which have been published in the *American*

Journal of Men's Health, show that a significant number of first-time expectant fathers experience depression during their partner's pregnancy. This may have important clinical implications for depression screening and early prevention efforts in expectant fathers.

"The [mental health](#) of men remains a neglected area of research and one that is not adequately addressed during the transition to parenthood," says senior author, Dr. Deborah Da Costa, researcher in the Division of clinical epidemiology at the RI-MUHC and associate professor in the Department of Medicine at McGill University. "Highlighting these findings in Canada increases awareness in expectant parents, new parents, and importantly in healthcare providers who are in contact with expectant couples during prenatal appointments."

The research team recruited 622 men in Quebec over a period of one and half years. Expectant fathers completed online questionnaires measuring various factors such as mood, physical activity, sleep quality, social support, marital adjustment, financial stress, and demographics, during their partner's third semester. Researchers found that 13.3 per cent of expectant fathers experienced elevated levels of depressive symptoms during their partner's pregnancy.

Most of the factors associated with depression in men were identified to be modifiable, meaning that tools are available to help cope with these difficulties. For the first time in this area, researchers also looked at sleep in relation to depression and found that men who were having sleep difficulties were more at risk of experiencing depression.

"These are important signals because some of these factors may worsen in postpartum; certainly sleep will be compromised in the first years," explains Dr. Da Costa who is also a researcher from the Experimental Therapeutics and Metabolism Program at the RI-MUHC. "We know that antenatal depression is the strongest predictor for [postnatal depression](#)."

So teaching fathers and screening for this early on, can be beneficial in terms of decreasing the risk or the continuation of [depression](#) postpartum."

More information: Dads Get Sad Too: Depressive Symptoms and Associated Factors in Expectant First-Time Fathers, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26385988

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