

Study shows people fail to recognise male postnatal depression

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A new study shows that people are almost twice as likely to correctly identify signs of postnatal depression in women than in men.

The research, published in the *Journal of Mental Health* and led by

Professor Viren Swami of Anglia Ruskin University, involved 406 British adults aged between 18 and 70.

The participants were presented with case studies of a man and a woman both displaying symptoms of postnatal depression, a [mental health issue](#) which affects as many as 13% of new parents.

This new study found that participants of both sexes were less likely to say that there was something wrong with the male (76%) compared to the female (97%).

Of the participants who did identify a problem, they were significantly more likely to diagnose postnatal depression in the female case study than the male case study. The study found that 90% of participants correctly described the female case study as suffering from postnatal depression but only 46% said the male had postnatal depression.

The participants commonly believed that the man was suffering from stress or tiredness. In fact, stress was chosen 21% of the time for the man compared to only 0.5% for the woman, despite identical symptoms.

Overall the study found that attitudes were significantly more negative towards the male case study compared to the female. It found that participants reported lower perceived distress towards the male case study's condition, believed that the male's condition would be easier to treat, expressed less sympathy for the male and were less likely to suggest that the male seek help.

Lead author Viren Swami, Professor of Social Psychology at Anglia Ruskin University, said: "Our findings suggest that the British public are significantly more likely to believe that something is 'wrong' when seeing a woman displaying the symptoms of postnatal depression, and they are also far more likely to correctly label the condition as postnatal

depression.

"There may be a number of reasons for this gender difference. It is possible that general awareness of paternal postnatal depression still remains relatively low and there might be a perception among the British public that postnatal depression is a 'women's issue' due to gender-specific factors such as pregnancy-induced hormonal changes and delivery complications.

"What is clear is that much more can be done to promote better understanding of paternal [postnatal depression](#), so people don't brush it off as simply tiredness or stress. This is particularly important as many men who experience symptoms of [depression](#) following the birth of their child may not be confident about asking for help and may be missed by [healthcare professionals](#) in the routine assessments of new parents."

More information: Viren Swami et al, Mental health literacy of maternal and paternal postnatal (postpartum) depression in British adults, *Journal of Mental Health* (2019). [DOI: 10.1080/09638237.2019.1608932](#)

Provided by Anglia Ruskin University

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