

The Mettle of Motherhood: A Journey of Togetherness

Chitrita Sengupta Chaki

Clinical Psychologist, Private Practice Kolkata

Corresponding Author: Chitrita Sengupta Chaki

E-mail: chritritasengupta@yahoo.com

“Women are the real architects of society” – Swami Vivekananda

As we celebrate Mother's Day on 11th of May. It is essential to honour motherhood, recognize and acknowledge their uniqueness, unquantifiable and selfless contribution of every mother in their children's success, sacrifices and the special bonds they share with their children and family. It's a day to express gratitude, love, and appreciation for mothers globally.

This year, International Mother's Day was celebrated under the theme “Togetherness and the enduring bond between mothers and their families”. Hence, it is a special day to address the emerging needs for the wellbeing for all mothers, whose contributions, along with primary physical health as well as mental health needs are often overlooked and ignored.

Since I strongly believe that nurturing, supporting, helping and encouraging a mentally healthy new mother in every household cannot be compromised. As a Mental Health Expert, I come across thousands of new mothers who are suffering silently and fighting the battle of depression alone, post-delivery or through life.

Hence, I took this opportunity to throw some light on the need for and importance of a better mental health for new mothers called post-partum. Motherhood is a transformative journey filled with joy, anxiousness, fear and a significant number of challenges and changes both physical and emotional. In this journey every mother faces the storm of prepartum discomforts; challenges and joy of becoming a new mother.

In almost all societies across the globe, motherhood is seen as the most crucial role of a woman. The birth of a child, despite being a very happy event, puts the mother into a lot of stress and uncertainties as she faces her new role and responsibilities. The first year of childbirth is not only a vital period involving emotional, physical and psychological as well as a societal challenge.

In the process of becoming a mother, a woman goes through a significant amount of change, instability, mental reorganization and rescheduling of life, adapting and adjusting to societal and family needs.

Prepartum

"Prepartum" refers to the period before childbirth, encompassing everything up to the delivering a child. It's often used interchangeably with "prenatal" or "antenatal," which also mean before birth.

Prepartum journey is not always a bed of roses, it has its share of ups and downs. This period encompasses a wide range of feelings and emotions experienced by a mother before the onset of labour and delivery, often involving a mix of excitement, anxiety, joy, fear, uncertainty and other emotional changes. A journey which deviates from the so-called beauty standards of the society, accepting physical changes and discomforts along with mood swings influenced by hormonal fluctuations, the physical and emotional adjustments of pregnancy, and the anticipation of the birth of a newborn and giving him/her the best of every comfort.

Postpartum

Postpartum refers to the period immediately following childbirth, typically lasting about six weeks, during which a woman's body returns to its pre-pregnancy state. It's a time of significant physiological and hormonal changes as the body recovers from the birth process. The postpartum period is also a time of major adjustments for both the mother and the new baby, as they adapt to life together.

A period where every new mother bears the pain of delivering a child, first step post-surgery, first breast feeding, responsibility of every wellbeing of the child. It's not less than fighting and winning a battle called motherhood. But a huge heart break occurs when a new mother feels neglected and the child becomes the hero after few hours of birth as every other individual is busy with the child ignoring the need of more care, love, empathy and nurturance. Here the new mother feels the challenge of giving the best of everything to the child and feels incomplete herself from within as she still feels the need to be nurtured.

The ugliest part of post-partum depression is every other experienced mother and other family members discounts the new mother's roller coaster of emotions, her worries, her desires to be loved and cared, a shoulder to lean on when sad and worried; a hand to hold when anxious and insecure; share her discomforts when unwell; a person to acknowledge and celebrate her smallest achievement as a mother. A new mother at times fearful about losing her "My Man"- a new father but a partner for long.

Key Aspects of the Postpartum Period

Physical Changes

The body undergoes numerous changes like uterine shrinkage, healing of birth-related wounds, shrinking and discolouring of skins, disfigured body shape, loose belly and so on.

Emotional Adjustments

Postpartum can be a time of emotional ups and downs, with many women experiencing the "baby blues" or even postpartum depression.

Post Partum Depression

Postpartum depression (PPD), also known as perinatal depression, is a mood disorder that can affect women after childbirth. It's characterized by intense sadness, anxiety, and other symptoms that can interfere with a mother's ability to care for herself and her baby.

The journey of motherhood can start with a bouquet of powerful emotions ranging from excitement and joy to fear and anxiety. But it can also result in something that a mother and their family might not expect — depression.

Warning Signs and symptoms of PPD

A new mother could develop PPD if five or more signs or symptoms that last longer than 2 weeks. Signs and symptoms of PPD include:

Changes in your feelings:

- Feeling depressed almost every day
- Feeling of shame and guilt
- Feeling panicked or scared most of the time
- Having severe mood swings

Changes in your everyday life:

- Having little interest in things you normally like to do
- Feeling tired all the time
- Eating a lot more or a lot less than is normal for you
- Gaining or losing weight
- Having trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- Having trouble concentrating or making decisions

Changes on how you think about yourself or your baby:

- Having trouble bonding with your baby
- Thinking about hurting yourself or your baby
- Thinking about suicide (killing yourself)

The psychological changes of a new mother can be influenced by the individual's current situation, availability of care and acceptance, economic condition, physical conditions her religious beliefs and outlooks and more importantly the preparedness and knowledge of the situation.

CONCLUSION

As the theme of this year's Mother's Day, "Togetherness and the enduring bond between mothers and their families", it is important for every new mother to identify the warning signs of Post Partum Depression as soon as possible. Seeking help on time is not a sign of weakness, shame or anyone's fault. The husbands, new fathers and family members out there along with celebration and welcoming a new member in your family must not ignore the person who helped you to celebrate this happiness and joy. Rather, stand by "her – the new mother" together as a family so that she can sail the ocean of emotions and helplessness and emerge winner to a wonderful mother.

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