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Postpartum depression, prevalence and risk factors in a multiethnic population

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Background: Ethnic minorities in Western countries are often exposed to stressors related to migration which may affect their mental health, placing them at higher risk for development of postpartum depression. Little is known about depressive symptoms and risk factors for postpartum depression for ethnic minority groups living in Western societies.

Aim: To identify the prevalence of postpartum depression and associations with ethnicity and other risk factors.

Method: Population-based, prospective cohort of 643 pregnant women (59% ethnic minorities) attending primary antenatal care from early pregnancy to postpartum in Oslo between 2008 and 2010. Questionnaires covering demographics, health problems and psychosocial factors were collected through interviews. Postpartum depression was defined as a sum score ≥ 10 by the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS) at 14 weeks postpartum.

Results: Preliminary results show that prevalence of depression was significantly different between Western Europeans: 4.8 % (95 % CI: 2.26-7.34) and ethnic minorities: 12.7% (9.31-16.09). Ethnic minorities (OR=3.69; 95% CI (1.68-8.10)) had significantly higher risk for depression than Western Europeans. When adjusting for socioeconomic position, the OR was reduced by approximately 19 % (OR=2.97 (1.31-6.71)). Other significant risk factors were recent adverse life events and self-reported history of depression.

Conclusion: The prevalence of postpartum depression was significantly higher in ethnic minorities. The increased risk persisted after adjustment for other risk factors. Our findings point to the potential of improving mental health among high-risk ethnic minority pregnant women by improving socioeconomic conditions.