PATERNAL DEPRESSION - CONSEQUENCES ON CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT

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Objectives:

Understanding the impact of paternal depression on children's development.

Background:

It's undeniable that the father has a fundamental role on their children's cognitive and emotional development. Fathers are exposed to several stress-inducing biopsychosocial factors that can lead to depressive symptoms, having a negative impact on the whole family.

Materials and Methods:

Non-systematic review through Pubmed and Medscape search, using the keywords: "paternal depression", "children of depressed fathers" and "approach to paternal depression".

PATERNAL PERINATAL DEPRESSION (PPND)

It is a major depressive disorder in men **between the first trimester of pregnancy and the end of the first year** of the infant's life.

>10% of fathers experience **depression** and **anxiety** during the **perinatal period**¹

Prenatal: 4-16% Postnatal: 2%-18%

% of Paternal Anxiety during the perinatal period

MEN'S EXPERIENCE OF DEPRESSION

↑ **ANGER**
↑ **HYPERACTIVE BEHAVIOUR**
↑ **IRRITABILITY**

↓ **IMPULSE CONTROL**
↓ **DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE**
↓ **AVOIDANCE BEHAVIOUR**¹

NEUROIMAGIOLOGY

↓ Striatum and subgenual anterior cingulate cortex volumes in Paternal Postpartum Depression⁵

EFFECTS ON FATHER-INFANT INTERACTION

↓ **RESPONSIVENESS IN FREE-PLAY**
↓ **ENGAGEMENT IN ACTIVITIES**
↓ **PHYSICAL CONTACT**
↑ **RISK OF SPANKING**

Depression impacts on father's **linguistic production** (rate, volume and pitch), **facial expression, gaze, posture and gestures**

↓ **Emotional availability** to stimulate the infant with ↓ positive animated faces and voices

Sleep disturbance, low energy and loss of interest contribute to ↓ involvement in interactions with the infant and ↓ **limit setting**^{1,7}

IMPACT ON CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT AND RELATIONSHIPS

• Parental depressive symptoms detected at 6 weeks postpartum were associated with **impaired bonding** with the infant at **6 months** postpartum for both parents⁵

Twice the risk of suffering from specific psychiatric disorders at **school-age**⁵
Poor psychological and behavioural outcomes in children aged **4 to 5 years** and **poor school performance**⁵

↑ **impact on emotional and social development** ♀

↑ **hyperactivity** ♂

↑ **risk of depression in adolescence**

• ↓ **expressive vocabulary** between **9 and 24 months** of age.
• ↓ **motor and socio-emotional development** in **1-year-old** children
• ↑ **risk of behavioural problems** at **42 months** of age⁵

• **Externalizing problems** at **2-3 years** of age⁵

TREATMENT PROBLEMS

Reluctance to **SEEK HELP** for mental health issues
NEGATIVE ATTITUDES towards therapy
Likely to **DISCONTINUE TREATMENT**¹

CBT (Cognitive behavioural therapy)

is **HIGHLY EFFECTIVE** for adult depression and generalized anxiety disorder

! It may be less effective than medication for treating chronic depression¹

Interventions should be **FAMILY-FOCUSED**⁴

Conclusions:

These results indicate that paternal depression has as a significant impact on the child's future as maternal depression. Consequently, an early intervention to identify and answer the fathers' needs is crucial. This way, further research should be done in this area.

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