appreciate the relevance of poorly quantifiable clinical phenomena that are obscured by randomisation, and devaluing the intangible differences between individuals, thus potentially devaluing them (patients and care providers).²⁷ The condemnation of vaginal breech delivery by one randomised controlled trial and its sweeping effect on clinical practice show how each of these philosophical limits can be exceeded.

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Q&A

Effect of postnatal depression on other members of the mother's family

Question

Does anyone know of any journals or sites with information on how postnatal depression affects the rest of the family, not just the mother?

Oliver Mallon, student nurse, Queens University, Belfast

Answer

Different effects appear at different stages of child development. The leading figure in UK research in Professor Lynn Murray. She has been publishing in the area of effects of postnatal depression on child development for about 15 years. Here are details of three of her characteristic studies.

Murray L. The impact of postnatal depression on infant development. *J Child Psychol Psychiatry* 1992;33:543-61.

Infants of postnatally depressed mothers performed worse on object concept tasks, were more insecurely attached to their mothers, and showed more mild behavioural difficulties. Postnatal depression had no effect on general cognitive and language development, but seemed to make infants more vulnerable to adverse effects of lower social class and male sex.

Murray L, Woolgar M, Cooper P, Hipwell A. Cognitive vulnerability to depression in 5-year-old children of depressed mothers. *J Child Psychol Psychiatry* 2001;42:891-9.

In a situation of mild stress (the threat of losing a deal in a competitive children's card game), 5 year old children of depressed mothers were more likely to express depressive cognitions (hopelessness, pessimism, and low self worth) than children of well mothers. The association between depressive cognitions and recent exposure to maternal depression was in part accounted for by current maternal hostility to the child.

Sinclair D, Murray L. Effects of postnatal depression on children's adjustment to school. Teacher's reports. *Br J Psychiatry* 1998;172: 58-63.

Family social class and the child's sex had the greatest influences on 5 year old children's behavioural adjustment. However, both postnatal and recent maternal depression were associated with significantly raised levels of child disturbance, particularly among boys and those from lower social class families.

Woody Caan, professor of public health, APU, Chelmsford

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