

Research Reviews

Detecting Mental Health Problems During Pregnancy

Kelly, R.H., Zatzick, D.F. & Anders, T.F. (2001) The Detection and Treatment of Psychiatric Disorders and Substance Use Among Pregnant Women Cared for in Obstetrics. The American Journal of Psychiatry. 158: 213-219

In a University Obstetrical Practice serving high-risk clients in the state of California, a study revealed that 38% of the women met screening criteria for psychiatric disorders or substance abuse. Of those with positive screening, 43% had symptoms recorded in their medical charts; diagnoses in 18%; evaluations in 35%; and treatments in only 23%. The screening instruments were the Primary Care Evaluation of Mental Disorders Patient Health Questionnaire, available on Medline:

Spitzer, R.L., et al., (2000) Validity and Utility of the PRIME-PRIME-MD Patient Health Questionnaire Obstetrics-Gynecologic Patients: the PRIME-MD Patient Health Questionnaire Obstetrics-Gynecology Study. AmJ Obstet Gynecol (2000) 183-759-769.

And the CAGE questionnaire about alcohol and substance abuse, also available on Medline:

Midanik, L.T., et. al, (1998) Alcohol and Drug CAGE Screeners for Pregnant, Low-Income Women: the California Perinatal Needs Assessment. Alcohol Clin Exp Res 1998: 22:121-125.

Of the 70/186 women screened positive, the most common was depression (59%). An equal percentage had anxiety symptoms; 28% had substance use symptomology; 10% showed agitation/behavioral symptoms; 10% had sleep disorders; and 3% had an eating disorder.

Women with psychiatric and substance abuse were more often recorded as not having adequate prenatal care; having more prior pregnancies; not living with a partner; and having lower socioeconomic status. It seems important to increase the detection and treatment of psychiatric and substance use cases during pregnancy and to develop interventions during pregnancy that can modify the woman's readiness for mothering.