The Experience of Postpartum Depression as Reflected in Fabric Art

Hilary Plandon
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Introduction

- The what, who and why of postpartum depression
- Artistic methodology for expressing phenomenological experiences
- Implications of research for nursing practice
What is Postpartum Depression?

- A non-psychotic depressive disorder
- Occurs anytime within the first year of the infant’s life
DSM–IV Definition of PPD

- Psychiatric diagnosis requires 5 or more symptoms for a minimum of 2 weeks:
  - Insomnia / extreme sleepiness
  - Psychomotor agitation or deceleration
  - Fatigue
  - Changes in appetite
  - Feelings of worthlessness, guilt
  - Decreased concentration
  - Suicidal ideation
  - And depressed mood and/or loss of interest or pleasure
PPD is experienced by approximately 10% to 26% of postpartum women worldwide.

24% to 50% of men who have partners with postpartum depression, experience depression themselves.
Why?

- **Biomedical Risk Factors**
  - Hormones
  - Anemia
  - Thyroid dysfunction

- **Psychosocial Risk Factors**
  - Previous depression; familial & personal
  - Social factors:
    - Isolation, inadequate social support, relationship challenges, childcare stress, prenatal anxiety, history of sexual abuse, exposure to poor maternal role models
Impact on Women

- Feeling anxious, overwhelmed, inadequate, guilty & unable to cope
- Impaired concentration, loss of interest in pleasurable activities, chronic fatigue, irritability, changes in eating habits,
- Relationship disturbances between infant and mother
- Decreased breastfeeding
- Risk of suicide
Impact on Children

- Poor cognitive functioning, setbacks in behavioural, emotional adjustment, sleep disturbances, temper tantrums, eating difficulties, attachment disorders

- Boys: demonstrate attention–deficit type behaviour, delayed cognitive development

- Girls: become withdrawn, anxious
Treatment

- Pharmacological Therapy
  - Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor medication
  - Hormone therapy

- Non-Pharmacological Therapy
  - Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)
  - Interpersonal Psychotherapy
  - Non-directive counseling
  - Support groups

- Early Identification
My Research

- Qualitative, interpretive, phenomenological research study

- Hermeneutic phenomenology; to understand the essence of the lived experience or the human way of being in the world.

- Researcher and participant bring their experiences to the research
Methodology

- Purposive sampling

- 4 women who self identified a history of PPD and self identified as having recovered

- Creation of visual representation of their experience with PPD.

- Interviews and follow up focus group for validation of findings
Themes

“Cast Adrift”

Refers to feelings of isolation and vulnerability

- Lack of control over life
- Isolated from one’s support system
- Feelings of abandonment
- Unfulfilled expectations
- Profound fear
Themes (cont’d)

“Torn Asunder”

Refers to the negative impact of PPD on women’s self concept and sanity

- Loss of identity
- Fear of losing one’s mind
- Need to escape
“Safely Home”

Reflects the positive outcomes of PPD – lessons have been learned and blessings counted
The journey of PPD is likened to being cast adrift down a river, but finally arriving safely at the destination.
Professional support may be difficult to access; health professionals often did not take the women’s concerns seriously.

The negative impact of PPD may affect women for many years after their recovery.
Art as Data

- Photo novella as tool for empowerment in feminist theory research (Wang & Burris, 1994)

- Hermeneutic photography used to understand families’ experiences of health and illness (Hagedorn, 1994)

- The use of participant’s drawings to appreciate their illness (Guillemin, 2004)
Art “is inquiry, a way of asking questions, seeking information, provoking thought, communicating, and offering something about the world as perceived by humans” (Baumann, 1999)

“The work of art makes something manifest that would otherwise pass unnoticed” (Cerbonne, 2008)
PPD Reflected in Fabric Art

- Explanation of 5 panels of the wall-hanging
  - Heart
  - Clock
  - Word Grid
  - Scene Quadrants
  - Telephone
The Lived Experience of Postpartum Depression
Nurses have an important role in:
- Early education re PPD
- Facilitating the early identification of PPD
- Validating women’s experiences of postpartum depression
- Providing referrals for treatment
- Providing ongoing therapeutic ‘listening visits’
- Validating men’s experience of postpartum depression
- Advocating for appropriate mental health services

Nurses must be aware that the effects of PPD can have a long lasting impact on a woman’s life


THANKS!