

News

Dads' Postpartum Depression Ups Odds of Spankings

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Growing evidence shows that fathers can suffer from [postpartum depression](#) too. A new study finds that dads' post-baby blues can have a negative effect on their parenting and increase the chances that a child will be [spanked](#).

Researchers from the University of Michigan studied more than 1,700 fathers of 1-year-olds and found that 7 percent of them reported a "major depressive episode" in the time since the birth of their babies.

In many cases, the black moods apparently were taken out on the children, making it four times more likely that they had been spanked recently and half as likely that their dads read them stories on a regular basis, according to the paper in the April issue of [Pediatrics](#).

Pediatricians could play a bigger role in suggesting ways to combat fathers' postpartum depression, since about 77 percent of the fathers who were down said they'd talked to their baby's doctors in the past year.

"Pediatric providers should consider screening fathers for depression, discussing specific parenting behaviors [e.g., reading to children and appropriate discipline], and referring for treatment if appropriate," wrote the authors led by Dr. R. Neal Davis.

The new dads' experience with depression resembled that of new moms, as they were most likely to suffer symptoms within the first year of the child's life.

Experts attribute the trend to fathers' increased role in child care. Though that heightened participation has been supported by the American Academy of Pediatrics, what's difficult is getting doctors to recognize postpartum depression in men and help them do something about it.

Pediatricians need to "embrace paternal perinatal depression screening with the same vigor" they do with mothers, which could pose a challenge, wrote Dr. Craig F. Garfield of Northwestern University in Chicago and Richard Fletcher of the University of Newcastle in Australia in an editorial published with the study.

"The field of pediatrics is now faced with finding ways to support fathers in their parenting role much in the same way we support mothers," they said.

The latest research relied on interviews with 1,746 fathers of babies who were a year old. The

data had been collected for a large-scale national study on families and children in the U.S. born between 1998 and 2000.

About 7 percent of the men said they'd been very depressed at some point during the previous year.

The sad fathers were more likely to be unemployed and have substance abuse problems, which probably contributed to their state of mind, according to the paper. But they were just as likely as the other fathers to have spoken to their child's pediatrician during the time period in question.

Forty-one percent of depressed dads reported spanking their babies in the prior month, compared to only 13 percent of other fathers, and 41 percent of them said they'd read stories to their children at least three days a week versus 58 percent of the happier dads.

Put another way, the depressed fathers were 62 percent less likely to say they'd read to their children at least three days a week and 3.92 times more likely to have spanked them in the past month.

Both groups of fathers were equally likely to sing songs to their kids and play with them, the findings showed.

The issue of spanking children has been hotly debated, but the researchers found it worrying that these babies were a year old or younger, at "a developmental stage when children are unlikely to understand the connection between their behavior and subsequent punishment and when spanking is more likely to cause physical injury."

Postpartum depression occurs after the birth of a child and is typically accompanied by significant feelings of sadness, emptiness, anger, irritability and listlessness. Insomnia or sleeping too much are also common symptoms.

http://www.aolhealth.com/2011/03/14/new-dads-postpartum-depression-ups-odds-of-spankings-study-fin/?icid=maing|main5|dl5|sec1_Ink3|49911