

The Importance of Fathers Mental Health

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Received: June 11, 2019; **Published:** June 26, 2019

As we know the biggest killer in men under 50 in the UK is suicide and with over half a million male suicides globally each year we must ask new fathers about their mental health. Fathers with perinatal mental health problems are 47 times more likely to be rated as a suicide risk than at any other time in their lives (Quevedo, *et al.* 2010).

In the fathers I have spoken as recently as last week this still isn't always the case when the partner has had a traumatic birth often it is dad who is traumatised as well. As we know Post traumatic stress disorder is an anxiety disorder either witnessing or experiencing a life threatening event. Seeing a partner in distress and lack of communication or feeling hopelessness are often talked about among dads.

Anyone can suffer from PTSD from a serious road accident, violent assault, serious health problems and of course childbirth experiences (NHS Information) Prof Jonathan Blsson, who heads up the traumatic stress service centre in Cardiff said "Some extreme childbirths are up there in some of the most traumatic experiences and most acute cases of PTSD I have seen".

The symptoms range like depression from mild, moderate to severe and if untreated can escalate to more severe end of anxiety and depression. As we know men more often get help at crisis point and are more concerned about their partners than their own as they don't want their mental health concerns to impact on their mental health. We live with anxiety and depression in men it can be buried then suppressed which often then comes out in a total personality change with men feeling anger while using negative coping skills like drinking for one.

What is often missed is talking about the experience of the labour as many mums and now dads are getting diagnosed with postnatal depression (1 in 10 dads suffer postnatal depression, Wood 2019) which in fact the symptoms from the PTSD. As we know there could be a number of reasons why parents get depressed during the antenatal or postnatal period with many undiagnosed disorders before becoming a parent on top of the lack of sleep, lifestyle changes, financial worries and let's not forget the transition of parenthood.

The research is now coming out about fatherhood - mental health with up to fifty percent of fathers becoming depressed while looking after their partners with postnatal depression (Goodman 2004) which if dads are the only ones struggling that's has to be the same impact figures for mums.

What's concerning is often its mums who are messaging me as their partners mental health is impacting on their own mental health with relationships sadly ending when if support was in place that may have not been the case. As we know the first few years in a child's life are vital and when dad is unsupported for his anxiety and depression can impact the child's development. With more stay at home dads and single dads now who are often not the bread winner this can be even more isolating with little groups for them to attend.

So, we need a more person centred approach as mental health is so complex and there may be so many underlying..... before even becoming a parent. I have supported a few dads who had PTSD to deal with from the armed forces and then sadly witness still birth or nearly losing their partners who are still not getting the right specialist support which I feel sad to hear still in 2019.

At present, I am challenging the World Health Organisation who only screen mum for their mental health to screen and put early prevention in place for dads as until then we will still have Fathers going into other services when it can be treated early as it will save money but most importantly it will save lives too.

Volume 8 Issue 7 July 2019

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