

Abstract

The mother's **Postnatal Mental Health** has multidimensional interplay with her child, spouse, family and generations in the family. It has become a major concern for both the medical profession and the public in the last few years. However, empirical data on local population is far from adequate.

The North-West New Territories (NWNT) was chosen for the study for both convenience and its unique features. It is a region with significant geographical segregation from the rest of the Special Administrative Region. There are data suggesting that people living in the region are suffering from a multitude of psychosocial disadvantages. It is therefore interesting to look into this target population, especially during a period of overwhelming changes and stresses in the whole community.

Tuen Mun Hospital (TMH) is the regional hospital for NWNT, serving a population of one million. It also serves more than 60% of parturiting women in this region. A total of **509 new mothers** were recruited in the postnatal wards (282 in 1999 and 227 in 2000). Medical data were collected from hospital records. Participants were invited to complete the first questionnaire on **the second day of the puerperium** and the second questionnaire **six weeks later**.

Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS) was administered in both occasions. The **6th Week EPDS score** was adopted as the outcome indicator during the evaluation of **Risk Factors**. The impact of **Antenatal Health Education** on the mental health of new mothers in TMH, other hospitals and Maternity and Child Health Centres was also explored.

There were **13.3%** participants scored above the 12/13 cut-off point in 6th week EPDS score in 1999, which was a year of serious economic adversity. There were **17.1%** participants scored above the cut-off point in 2000. On the other hand, new mothers in Tuen Mun area were not found to be particularly poor in mental health, when compared with their counterparts in the neighbouring districts (Yuen Long and Tin Shui Wai) but slightly worse than the Shatin sample in 1996-97 (study in PWH).

Regression analysis revealed that **Early Puerperal Mood State** was a strong predictor of the postnatal depressive symptom level (6th week EPDS score). Other significant predictors included **Anxiety Towards Labour and Labour Ward**, **History of Self-Harm** and **Prolonged Labour**. Other associated factors included **Perceived Social Support** and **Confidence in Childcare** at 6th week. Screening for postnatal depression in early puerperium with a risk factor checklist could be valuable.

The attendance of **antenatal classes** in TMH (and other major hospitals) was found to be associated with a better outcome. This could be attributed to attendees' initiative and structure of the classes. Further effort and research in this field are indicated. Reference could be made on the results of this study, in design of antenatal health educational activities.