

Abstract

Background: Postnatal depression (PND) is a common and potentially serious disorder. There were few studies on its outcome and no data existed for the Chinese population in Hong Kong. The previous work was mostly short-term follow up studies of the course of illness and yielded conflicting results. This study aims at evaluating the clinical and psychosocial outcome of PND and the predictors of the clinical outcome.

Method: This study is part of a prospective longitudinal study of psychological well-being of 959 Chinese women after childbirth. Three hundred and thirty seven subjects who delivered two years before were recruited from the original participants according to the score of GHQ. This also included all women diagnosed to have major or minor depression at three months post-partum. The demographic data, perinatal adjustment and clinical variables were obtained from the previous database. Follow up interviews were successfully carried out for 301 subjects. The clinical and psychosocial outcomes were measured. Prognostic factors of PND were identified.

Results: The outcome of PND was unfavourable with the remission rate of only 42.1% at two years post-partum. The illness resulted in impairment in quality of life and social functioning. It also had

tremendous impact on the women's marriage and the family economics. Predictors of poor outcome included marital problem as suggested by high score of Index of Marital Satisfaction, entrenched in-laws problem and poor social support as suggested by poor support from people other than their husbands.

Conclusion: The findings in this study support the need of assertive treatment of PND with particular attention to the concomitant psychosocial problems. The predictors of outcome found in this study provide a basis for further research.