

MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS IN PREGNANT WOMEN DURING CURRENT COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Kanwal Mazhar¹, Sajjad Hussain², Rooh Ullah³, Hassan Raza⁴, Arisha Aamir⁵, Almas Asif⁵,
Fawad Shabir Memon^{6,7}, Jamila Haider⁸ & Muhammad Anas³

¹Department of Microbiology, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, Pakistan

²Department of Microbiology, Harbin Medical University, China

³Department of Microbiology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan

⁴Department of Microbiology, Abbottabad University of Science and Technology, Abbottabad, Pakistan

⁵Department of Microbiology, Comwave Institute of Science and Technology, Islamabad, Pakistan

⁶Fawad Shabir Memon, National Institute of Health, Islamabad, Pakistan

⁷Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology (SZABIST), Karachi, Pakistan

⁸Department of Microbiology, Shaheed Benazir Buttho University, Peshawar, Pakistan

* * * * *

Dear Editor,

Even though for majority of women pregnancy period is a blessed period of their life but a few expecting women encountered a range of negative emotions in those ninth months which lead to depression and anxiety. Maternal mental health issues are interlinked with both short- and long-term health risks for the affected female parent and as well as for the child. The entire health and functional performance of the mother along with the children's mental, physiological and cognitive development is affected by the disrupting mental health situation of the mother. The risks of morbidities which are caused by the psychological problems such as intense stress, natural disasters and accidents and conflict situation could be increased among the perinatal mothers. As a result, it is possible that obstetric women are more exposed to mental health related issues during the pandemic of COVID-19.

From the past few months various studies have been published on the impact of COVID-19 on pregnancy but how the mother's mental health is affected by the recent pandemic is not yet properly understood. Although, the significance of considering the probability of high risk to avoid the unfavorable effects has been emphasized (Brooks et al. 2020). The risk might be associated with the welfare of the unborn baby, but increased by the unintentional consequences of preventive steps which include home and hospital based isolation, physical distancing, distant consultations with healthcare workers and non-availability of getting proper support and care prenatally, also during the delivery and during the postpartum period.

The World Health Organization and many professional communities of lady doctors and obstetricians have made a guideline for managing pregnancy and childbirth during COVID-19 pandemic situation, but the recommendations differ due to lack of hard evidence

(Liang & Acharya 2020). However, no increase in the infections risk and morbidity in pregnant mothers as compared to the rest of population have been reported by the initial studies conducted in China (Chen et al. 2020). On the other side, the situation varies as the outbreak spreads into the whole world and considered as pandemic. It has been observed that due to COVID-19 obstetric females are at high risks of getting more serious diseases, deliveries occur most commonly before due date and the death rates among the mothers and neonates has also been increased (Zaigham & Andersson 2020, Hantoushzadeh et al. 2020). Moreover, the miscarriage risks which are related to COVID-19 had remains unclear even though the severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus-2 (SARS-COV-2) has been detected in the placenta of second trimester pregnant woman (Baud et al. 2020). All these ambiguities have increased mental health stress which might lead to higher rates of abortions.

In the time of COVID-9, few women decide to give birth to a child at home and not in a hospital because majority of hospitals have restricted visits of family members and partners to expecting mother who are admitted for childbirth to the hospitals. This might generate an issue as only limited number of highly skilled gynecologists and obstetricians are agreed to provide their services and deliver the babies at home which might lead to higher number of complications related to mothers and infant's health. Even though it is not likely that SARS-COV-2 is transmitted by breast milk (World Health Organization 2020). Most of the mothers who have infected from the virus decided not to breast-feed their child for short period of time so to stop direct connection with the infants and thus, decrease the chances of neonatal infections. Nonetheless, the health of the mothers and the newborns might be deteriorated by these practices as well as from the early stoppage of the breast feeding (Shonkoff & Garner 2012).

Strict preventive measure against the COVID-19 lead to the reduction of the transmission of virus but these measures have negative effect on the mental health and generate anger, stress and confusion among the public (Brooks et al. 2020). This pandemic will create long lasting chaos which will inescapably generate economic consequences, and monetary uncertainties are expected to further elevate psychological burden and deteriorated the psychological condition of the pregnant and perinatal women. Alcohol utilization and drug addiction are some of the harmful methods which will be used by individuals to cope up with such critical situation, thus elevating the already existing psychological problems. This might lead to a rise in gender related intimate partner ferocity, decrease in preventive aid seeking behavior and upsurge in suicidal rates most commonly among immigrant and low earning families.

To fight and to overcome an unknown disease, every country around the globe is struggling in this unparalleled time. The significance of surveillance for novel rising threats to obstetric mothers and newborn could not be exaggerated during this critical period (Frey et al. 2019). Although, there are more serious problems in health care which recently overshadowed mental care needs. Creating adequate and strong evidence might take time but the point that pregnant females are at high risk of generating psychological problems like anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress diseases can be speculated safely. There is a considerable lack of awareness along with the reluctance to agree that the mental wellbeing of the expectant mothers is important to be taken care of at the time of such crises.

Conclusion

Therefore, it is concluded that development of appropriate strategies is important to reduce stress by diagnosing and managing mental health diseases in new mothers without delay at the time of pandemic. Screening techniques based on internet, online coun-

seling and web-related psychological assistance and therapeutic interventions might produce a significant role in this regard.

Acknowledgements: None.

Conflict of interest: None to declare.

References

1. Baud D, Greub G, Favre G et al.: *Second-Trimester Miscarriage in a Pregnant Woman With SARS-CoV-2 Infection*. *JAMA* 2020; doi: 10.1001/jama.2020.7233
2. Brooks SK, Webster RK, Smith LE et al.: *The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: rapid review of the evidence*. *Lancet* 2020; 395:912-920
3. Chen L, Li Q, Zheng D, Jiang H, Wei Y, Zou L et al.: *Clinical characteristics of pregnant women with Covid-19 in Wuhan, China*. *New England Journal of Medicine*. 2020; 382:e100(1)-e100(3). doi:10.1056/NEJMc2009226
4. Frey MT, Meaney-Delman D, Bowen V et al.: *Surveillance for Emerging Threats to Pregnant Women and Infants*. *J Womens Health (Larchmt)* 2019; 28:1031-1036
5. Hantoushzadeh S, Shamshirsaz AA, Aleyasin A et al.: *Maternal Death Due to COVID-19 Disease*. *Am J Obstet Gynecol* 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajog.2020.04.030>
6. Liang H & Acharya G: *Novel corona virus disease (COVID-19) in pregnancy: What clinical recommendations to follow?* *Acta Obstetrica et Gynecologica Scandinavica* 2020; 99:439-42
7. Shonkoff JP & Garner AS: *Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health; Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption, and Dependent Care; Section on Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics. The lifelong effects of early childhood adversity and toxic stress*. *Pediatrics*. 2012; 129:e232-e246
8. World Health Organization. *Q&A on COVID-19 and breastfeeding*. 2020 April 28; Available from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-on-covid-19-and-breastfeeding>
9. Zaigham M & Andersson O: *Maternal and perinatal outcomes with COVID-19: A systematic review of 108 pregnancies*. *Acta Obstet Gynecol Scand* 2020. doi:10.1111/aogs.13867

Correspondence:

Kanwal Mazhar, MD

Department of Microbiology, Abdul Wali Khan University
Mardan, Pakistan

E-mail: kanwal.mazhar4@yahoo.com