

30th World Congress on

ADVANCED NURSING PRACTICE

September 04-06, 2017 | Edinburgh, Scotland

Different coping strategies influence the development of PTSD among first-time mothers

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Background: Normal maternal stress during childbirth can sometimes evolve into greater levels of distress, leading to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Previous studies have shown that 1-6% of postpartum women experienced full spectrum PTSD. Individual personal characteristics, coping strategies and the birth related experience may positively or negatively alter a woman's vulnerability to post-traumatic symptoms (PTS).

Objective: To evaluate different coping strategies for PTS, described in the non-obstetric trauma literature, with respect to first time postpartum women.

Method: This was a prospective cohort study. Eligible women had a singleton pregnancy and delivered a healthy newborn at term. Five sets of questionnaires (perceived difficulty of the labor, cognitive emotion regulation, conservation of resources, parental perceived competence, and posttraumatic stress disorder checklist) were sent to the participants six weeks postpartum. Posttraumatic stress disorder was defined as per DSM-V criteria.

Results: A total of 188 completed questionnaires were considered for the final analysis. Two women (1.1%) had PTSD and 9 women (4.8%) had partial PTSD. Coping by self-blame and/or rumination together with perception of high distress during childbirth and perception of resource loss emerged as independent variables that were significantly associated with PTS severity. Objective birth factors such as different modes of delivery or episiotomy seem to have no significant impact on postpartum PTS in our study.

Conclusions: Individual subjective factors were related to postpartum PTS as opposed to objective factors. Redirecting resources to address postpartum negative coping mechanisms may reduce the overall incidence of full and partial postpartum PTSD.

Biography

Yeela Tomsis completed her PhD from Haifa University. She is a Lecturer and Researcher at Nursing School, Zefat Academic College. She is the Member of the Israeli Society of Psychosomatic in Obstetrics & Gynecology. She is a Psychiatric Rehabilitation trained professional and an Associate Lecturer in the Departments of Nursing, Social Work and Multidisciplinary Studies in Zefat Academic College, and in the Department of Multidisciplinary Studies in the University of Haifa, Israel. Her specialization includes research of post traumatic symptoms and crisis experience after childbirth.

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