Emotional Reactions to Racism and Postpartum Depression: Results from Michigan PRAMS, 2009-2010

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Background

- Depression is the leading cause of non-obstetric hospitalization in the United States.1
- Maternal depression can lead to negative consequences for
  - Mother
    - Maladaptive cognition, behaviors, and affect
    - Decreased quality of life
  - Child
    - High levels of negative affect and reactivity
    - Disorganized attachment
    - Increased externalizing behaviors2

Methods

- Michigan PRAMS (Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System) surveys around 1% of resident mothers who deliver a live birth in Michigan annually.
- Around 65% of mothers respond: their answers are weighted to reflect the whole population of resident, occurrant births each year.
- In 2009 and 2010, 1,645 non-Hispanic White and 1,224 non-Hispanic Black moms responded, for a combined sample size of 2,869.
- Descriptive frequencies for emotional reactions and postpartum depression were calculated.
- SUDAAN version 10.0.1 was used to calculate prevalence ratios for Black and White moms separately.

Emotional Reactions to Racism

- Defined as ‘Yes’ response to the question:
  *During the 12 months before your new baby was born, did you feel emotionally upset (for example, angry, sad, or frustrated) as a result of how you were treated based on your race?*

Results

- A higher percentage of Black mothers (19%) suffered from postpartum depression than White moms (7%, Figure 1).
- Over 40% of Black moms and 16% of White moms with postpartum depression also experienced emotional reactions to racism (Figure 2).
- Black moms facing emotional reactions to racism were three times more likely to develop postpartum depression than black moms who didn’t vs. only a twofold increase among White moms (Figure 3).

Postpartum Depression

- Defined as a score of eight or higher on index:
  *how often have you felt or experienced things this way since your new baby was born. Use the scale when answering:*
  1. Never
  2. Rarely
  3. Sometimes
  4. Often
  5. Always
  a. I felt down, depressed, or sad. 
  b. I felt hopeless. 
  c. I felt slowed down.

Conclusions

- Information about experiences with emotional reactions to racism may be useful for identifying women at high risk for developing postpartum depression.
- Findings support the potential utility of developing and validating racism related questions for the purpose of postpartum depression risk assessment.

References