



Fathers and Postnatal Depression

Research Results from the Project:
Men's Psychological Transition to Fatherhood
– *Mood Disorders in Men Becoming Fathers*

Overall Findings:

The study, which involved 600 men, indicates that around **7 percent** of fathers suffer from postnatal depression.

This is the equivalent of around **225-250 fathers** - of babies born at *Rigshospitalet* - who are suffering from postnatal depression on a yearly basis. Around 3.400 births take place at *Rigshospitalet* annually.

The current annual no. of births in Denmark is around 65.000. Hence on a national level the numbers indicate that roughly **4-4.500 fathers** suffer from postnatal depression.

About the study:

The study used two different scales to detect depression: 1) the 'Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale' (EPDS), traditionally used to screen for postnatal depression, and 2) the 'Gotland Male Depression Scale', normally used to assess so-called masculine states of depression.

The two scales list the following conditions as possible indicators of depression:

EPDS ('Traditional' depression)	Gotland Scale ('Male' depression)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unable to laugh or be humorous • Unable to look forward to things • Blaming myself unnecessarily when things go wrong • Feeling anxious or worried for no good reason • Feeling scared or panicky for no good reason • Things get on top of me • Have been so unhappy that I have had difficulty sleeping • Feeling sad or miserable • Feeling so unhappy that I have been crying • The thought of harming myself has occurred to me 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lowered stress threshold/more stressed out • More aggressive, outward-reacting, difficulties keeping self-control • Feeling of being burned out and empty • Constant, inexplicable tiredness • More irritable, restless and frustrated • Difficulty making ordinary everyday decisions • Sleeping too much/too little/restlessly, difficulty falling asleep/waking up early • In the morning especially having a feeling of disquiet/anxiety/uneasiness • Overconsumption of alcohol and pills • Excessive activity/working hard and incessantly, jogging etc. • Altered behaviour makes me difficult to deal with • Feeling/or being perceived by others as being gloomy, negative, hopeless • Feeling/or being perceived by others as having a greater tendency to self-pity, to be complaining or to seem "pathetic"



The 600 men who participated in the study were recruited through antenatal classes and midwife consultations at *Rigshospitalet*. The response rate among the men who received the questionnaire was 91%.

The study was carried out from February to December of 2005 and included 600 fathers whose child was born at *Rigshospitalet*. The men's condition was assessed by asking them to fill out a questionnaire roughly 6 weeks after the birth of their child.

Up to this point the *Fædreforskningsprogrammet* - the Paternal Research Programme - at *Rigshospitalet* has received about **70 fathers** for psychotherapeutic treatment for postnatal depression. In the course of this work it has become apparent that postnatal depressions may arise both before the birth and for a significant period afterwards.

The project receives funding from the EU-Commission under 'Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality 2001–2005'.

The Project has been carried out by a research group consisting of Head of Department Psychologist *Svend Aage Madsen*, Ph.D., Psychologist *Tina Juhl* and Midwife *Ann Louise Vestergaard* – all members of *Rigshospitalet's* Psychological and Psychosocial Research Unit.

Further Details:

When we used the questionnaire traditionally used to identify postnatal depression in women –EPDS – it was estimated that 5,0 % of men examined suffer from postnatal depression. Using a specific scale for 'Male depression' – the Gotland Scale – an estimated 3,4 % of men were found to be suffering from postnatal depression.

Making use of both scales the results show roughly 7% of fathers to be suffering from postnatal depression (the fathers who register as depressive according to both scales are counted only once). The number includes both first-time fathers and some who have previously had children.

The numbers show the following distribution amongst the 544 fathers who responded:

EPDS	27 (5,0%) ¹
Gotland	18 (3,4%) ²
Postnatal Depression including EPDS + Gotland	34 (6,5 %)³

Valid answers: ¹537, ²524, ³520

In comparison, international research shows that 10-14% of women suffer from postnatal depression as registered by the EPDS about 6 weeks after the birth.

Comparing postnatal depression with other forms of depression, recent Danish research shows that 3,5% of 20 to 50-year-old men suffer from moderate to severe depression at any given time. Twice as many women as men are diagnosed as suffering from some form of depression.

There are a number of indicators that men's psychiatric problems are generally underdiagnosed and that they hence receive insufficient treatment in this area.



Perspectives:

The fact that men do suffer from postnatal depression was demonstrated from the results of the research project 'Fathers' Bonding with their Infants' (2) and was first publicly announced in Denmark in 2002. Since then work has been going on at *Rigshospitalet* to investigate this phenomenon, including i.a. psychological treatment of men suffering from this condition.

The current survey indicates the necessity of training health-care staff -who come into contact with families during pregnancy, birth and infancy - to also be aware of the psychological state of fathers and to identify those suffering from postnatal depression.

Furthermore the method utilized here to identify postnatal depression in men will also be useful in developing tools to improve general diagnosis of depression in men.

It appears that for now *Rigshospitalet* is the only place in Denmark offering specific treatment – and the therapy we have been able to offer here at *Rigshospitalet* is underwritten by EU project-funds for a limited period of time only.

Thus the survey also implies a need to procure treatment for the roughly 4-4.500 men a year who are estimated to suffer from this condition nationwide

This finally indicates a need for training therapists providing treatment for men suffering from postnatal depression.

(1) Olsen, L., Mortensen, E. & Bech, P. (2004) *Prevalence of major depression and stress indicators in the Danish general population*. Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica: 109: 96–103.

(2) Madsen, S.Aa., Lind, D. & Munck, H. (2002) *Fædres tilknytning til spædbørn*. Copenhagen: Hans Reitzel Publishers.

For further information and details, please contact:

Head of Department Psychologist Svend Aage Madsen

Tel.: +45 35 45 47 67/+45 26 21 28 51 - email: svaam@rh.dk

Psychologist Tina Juhl

Tel.: +45 35 45 73 19 - email: tina.juhl@rh.hosp.dk

Midwife Ann Louise Vestergaard

Tel.: +45 35 45 50 22 - email: ann.louise.vestergaard@rh.hosp.dk

Kind regards

Svend Aage Madsen