

July 7, 2021

Thoughts from our Executive Director, Sadie Broekemeier

Maternal Mental Health

After recently returning from maternity leave, I have been thinking about maternal mental health from a different perspective. Usually, my approach to this topic is as a mental health provider, an outsider and a helper, not as a mother. The last couple months, I have been approaching the topic as an “insider”. I have been blessed with an overall easy post-partum period. After running a behavioral health clinic during a once in a century pandemic, having an opportunity to be home with a newborn has been a nice change. I have taken the opportunity to spend more time with my children, exercise, make healthier decisions and be more present. It has also allowed me to spend more time with my “mom friends”. A group of women who have given birth in the last six months, ranging from stay-at-home mothers to professionals in the healthcare field. During this time, it was clear to me that post-partum challenges have an unhealthy stigma and many barriers in seeking help and support.

As I looked at my group of postpartum mom, I couldn't help to think, if some of us were struggling, how many other mothers could be struggling that do not have the same type of supportive friends and family. As friends, we were able to openly discuss the need for therapy and for medication to combat the postpartum anxieties. We were able to discuss the similarities and differences in our post-partum period, as well as how we each struggled with not feeling “good enough” as a mother. Providing suggestions to each other in a carrying, compassionate and empathic way, in a judgement free zone. Our time together was more than just play dates for our children, it provided us with a space to share our fears, triumphs, struggles and most importantly we didn't feel alone.

It is normal to have the postpartum blues? Yes! In fact, 70- 80 percent of postpartum women report symptoms of the *Baby Blues*. The *Baby Blues* can be classified as a mild and short-term mood disorder and it is common that they only last a week or two. Symptoms can include emotional highs and lows, which range from happiness, joy, sadness and frustration. These symptoms are a normal response to exhaustion, hormone level changes and going through a life changing event. It is not only moms who can have these experiences, it is also reported that 25 percent of fathers have similar symptoms after baby arrives, sometimes referred to as *Sad Dads*.

It's important to remember that *Baby Blue* are often short-term and mild. As mothers continue in the post-partum period, if these symptoms continue or intensify to include anger, mood swings, fatigue, irritability, inability to bond with their baby, anxiety, worry or fear then it may be time to visit with their provider or a mental health practitioner. In fact, those that continue to suffer are not alone. It is estimated that 12- 35 percent of the population meet criteria for a post-partum mental health diagnosis. The lower the income, the higher likelihood that a woman will meet criteria. It has been reported that 1 in 5 woman who live below the poverty level meet criteria for a post-partum mental health diagnosis and the most shocking statistic, only 1 in 10 women receive treatment for post-partum issues. Why are we not doing more for our mothers? My hope is for a world where there is accessible support and collective strength to reduce the stigma of mental health for post-partum mothers.

There are many options and resources that can help provide a successful post-partum experience including

medication management, counseling services and group support. Knowing you are not alone, can make a big impact on reducing symptoms. To seek services please, reach out to *Pregnancy and Postpartum Support MN* at Ph. 612-787-7776 or for local counseling and medication management *Recovering Hope Outpatient Services* at 844-314-4673, can provide support during your post-partum period.

If you are looking for ways to support your loved one who is struggling with post-partum look please

1. *Listen to her feelings:* Let her talk, vent, and cry, be present and validate her feelings and do not discount her experience.
2. *Remind her that this is temporary:* This period will not last forever, even though it might feel like it.
3. *Provide Support:* Make a meal, watch the baby while she can sleep, take the older children to the park, etc. There are plenty of ways to provide support, however ask permission from the mother first.
4. *Reassure Her:* Provide positive feedback and notice the small things. Support her decisions about breastfeeding, sleep schedules, routines, and other parenting plans.

Sadie Broekemeier