Mental health and emotional sphere of women in the postnatal period

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This article deals with the study of features in psycho-emotional sphere of women in the postnatal period and analysis of factors affecting it. An overview of theoretical issue analysis has been provided. Some of the emotional changes of women in the early stages of motherhood are described, as well as individually-typological and socio-demographic characteristics contributing to psychological changes of a young mother. Factors requiring additional research and study, such as maternal age, method of birth, interpersonal family relations, readiness to motherhood and physical condition of the mother were also described. The article proves the need of psychological support for mothers in the postnatal period.

Key words: the postnatal period, mother, newborn, emotional security (safety), psychological well-being.

Introduction

The relevance of the topic is stipulated by the fact that less attention is paid exactly to postnatal period of all the perinatal period stages. But, this exactly period is no less important for psychological well-being of a mother and a child.

This work is caused by the need to expand understanding of the psychology of the postnatal period in its entirety.

Medical and psychological literature does not pay considerable attention to the determination of the influence of events of family psycho prophylaxis, psychotherapy and psycho correction during pregnancy on the emotional state of mothers in the postnatal period and the successful adaptation of "mother-child" system. The influence of psychological factors on the emergence and expression of anxiety and depressive symptoms in mothers of infants has not been sufficiently studied in medical psychology.

Currently, the existing "schools of motherhood" designed to prepare women for the upcoming birth, newborns care and other challenges that young mothers experience, provide women with information on the course of birth and skills for care. Such courses actually do not touch the subject of postnatal period and completely bypass the subject of emotional features attributable to this period. Despite the fact that the information readiness for childbirth and motherhood is an important part of psychological readiness, it cannot prepare women to everything that happens after birth. Thus, the practical relevance of the work is conditioned by the need to identify postnatal complications to prevent their occurrence. The problem of puerperal conditions is of interest to perinatal psychology, psychology of motherhood, age psychology, obstetrics and gynecology, fertility science and neonatology. The puerperal state is one of complex, multi-faceted and extremely sensitive conditions in women's lives. Postnatal period is widely regarded as a time of increased risk for development of symptoms of complex emotional state due to a combination of biological changes and changes of social roles in a woman's life. "Pregnancy means the end of existence of women as an independent individual and the beginning of indispensable and irrevocable ‘mother – child’ relations " (Raigorodskiy, 2003).

An interesting and important period in the life of a young mom starts with the birth of a child, and this period is very ambiguous from a psychological point of view. A great number of scientific works dedicated to problems of women at different stages of pregnancy and postnatal period (L.L.Baz, I. V.Dobryakov, O. A.Kopyl, O.V.Bazhenova, V.I.Brutman, G. G.Raigorodskiy). Most of our fellow citizens studied and researched pregnant women. They did their best to allocate factors influencing the psychological readiness for motherhood. There were described the formation of mother-to-child attachment during pregnancy,
changes in the motivational-need sphere of women during pregnancy.

Many foreign authors also devoted their works to the issues of perinatal psychology (G. Dick-Read, D. Stern, D.W. Winnicott, M. Oden).

On the one hand, the development of perinatology abroad was due to activities of medical pioneers, seeking new paths in obstetrics, and on the other hand, it was stipulated by the strong influence of psychoanalysis (Dobryakov, 2010). Unlike ethologists, psychoanalytically oriented researchers have shifted the focus of their interests in the mental history of the mother and her gestation period. They focused attention on the significance of the child’s images formation in the future mother’s imagination for her to adopt the her newborn baby.

Perinatal psychology is at the intersection of various fields of science, especially medicine and psychology. This link is obvious on the part of medicine, because hormones (stress, joy) emitted by the adrenal glands pass the placental barrier and affect baby. Consequently, the mother and the child constitute one of neurohumoral organism and each of them equally suffers from the adverse influence of the external environment, which affects the entire future child’s life. Relations with psychology can be viewed from two sides as emotions psychology and health psychology. On the part of emotions: a state of chronic psycho-emotional stress negatively affects the mother, her reproductive sphere, and, consequently, the future generation. Health psychology, in turn, seeks the birth of mentally and physically healthy, confident and adaptable to the social environment children.

The reason for posing the question on psycho-emotional sphere of a woman in the postnatal period was the analysis of literature that does not cover the presence of psychological innovations reflecting her personality changes.

Goal of article
is to give an idea of the postnatal period in general and to present the empirical research results.

Main material and results of research

The difficulties of the postnatal period are due to the large range of different factors. We may allocate 3 basic groups of these factors:
- physical and physiological reasons (changes of the body during pregnancy and after childbirth, etc.);
- social factors (family characteristics and social environment);
- psychological factors (woman’s personality traits, the way she perceives herself as a woman, mother, etc.).

Physiological factors include lack of sleep and fatigue associated with caring for a newborn. The physical factors include the presence of joints, difficulties with toilet and shower, ability to take care of herself and the baby. Physical factors also include the way a woman perceives her own body. A woman may over-react to the weight change, the appearance of baby belly, loss of body’s elasticity. There appears a fear that a woman will not be able to recover the antenatal form.

Social factors primarily include family affairs, as support and attention of those loved ones become essential for women in the postnatal period. Father plays an important role in the involvement of caring for the child. Availability of assistance for the household also is of great importance.

Social factors also include relations between women and the child’s doctor and medical personnel whom the woman is followed up after childbirth.

Gender and temperament of the infant can also affect the occurrence of unfavorable condition in the mother (J. Mark G. Williams, 1992). E.g. in cases when the birth of a boy was more desirable or expected to the family, and the girl was born. A negative reaction is particularly displayed in cases if socio-cultural notions of the child are more associated with a “son”, where the birth of a daughter is perceived as a little tragedy. Regarding the temperament of the child, mothers of more calm children cope with postnatal changes much easier and faster.

Psychological factors can be considered from 2 sides: - personal characteristics of women; - attitude to motherhood, the willingness to adopt a new social role.

Here are some of personal characteristics affecting the postnatal state of women: level of stress resistance, level of anxiety, self-esteem level and self-confidence. There is also the presence of tendency to hypochondria, immaturity, internal locus of control (manifested in the charges themselves), “negative thinking” i.e. an assessment of events with a negative point of view in relation to the selves, etc.

B. Chalmers believes that reasons for psychological instability in women’s condition often are associated with the experience regarding the maternal role, than with the experience of childbirth. If a recently given birth woman is captured by the romantic myths of motherhood, and there is an idealistic notions about the child, then the probability of a loss of emotional equilibrium increases.

Postnatal fear of young mothers is a frequent and very diverse phenomenon. Most women when left one-on-one with their own little defenseless and the first time such a strange child, begin experiencing an irresistible obsessive sense of alarm. This situation particularly often occurs if the mother has experienced a recent stress or feels guilty. Whatever it was, it is important to understand that fear associated with a child or motherhood is the natural reaction of women after childbirth, intended to force a woman to take up her new responsibilities in caring for a newborn. Psyche of a delivered woman is very unstable, so, the increasing anxiety that turns into a strong unreasonable fear, can strongly violate the condition of the mother, and as a result, can impair the baby.

Most mothers in the postnatal period experience a state of deep despair. This is a very common feeling, especially if a child is firstborn. A woman can give up, she may become indifferent even to her own baby, and a feeling of depression and oppression appears. Tiredness from sleepless nights and the cycle of household chores join this state. Although this is quite a natural and often necessary stage of adaptation to motherhood, it proceeds most severely with the women failed to be psychologically prepared for a new role during pregnancy. Mood instability, irritability, confusion can last from several weeks to months, so it is better not to wait until this temporary condition will pass, but to take action and help yourself to cope with the coming depression.

A feeling of hostility to own child is a very disturbing phenomenon, but actually, not so rare from a psychological point of view. Many mothers do not want to realize these
socio unapproved feelings, the others try to hide them, and only a few find courage and strength to openly admit them. Anyway, it means that the woman is ready to deal with the problem, and she has a desire to establish a harmony in her inner world and to love her baby.

There is a great lot of reasons for the emergence of such negative emotions. Perhaps the baby was born the wrong gender, other than expected, and mom feels guilty, and the baby is perceived as unnecessary, or maybe the woman had serious problems in the family or with the father of that child, or pregnancy and childbirth have caused destruction of pre-shaped life projects. Anyway, many moms, without even realizing it, blame the child for being the cause of such changes. However, it is not worth blaming yourself for these thoughts, as self-flagellation will only aggravate the problem.

This condition is like a vicious circle: the feeling of hostility is joined with the sense of guilt over own emotions and thoughts, and it leads to more irritation and an attempts to take the negative state out on the child. It is very important to understand the true cause of aggressiveness, irritation and rejection of the child. Perhaps the woman is just too tired, or tries to take over too much and does not know whom to share her feelings with? Sometimes it may be necessary to stay alone to understand that the kid not around now is heart-blood, the all-time favorite. It also sometimes happens that the newborn does not fit the "life script" of a woman that absolutely disorients her.

Dinora Pines in her book "A Woman's Unconscious Use of Her Body" writes: "After delivery there is a period of adjustment to a feeling of void and emptiness where the baby once was. The mother's body image has to change once again, in order to feel whole and not empty, before there can be reconciliation with the actual birth and the recognition of the baby as a separate individual, and yet, at the same time, there has to merge into this child, the baby that was at one time such an intimate part of her own body. The mother may feel bewildered by not immediately feeling that the baby sees does not evoke overwhelming maternal love. Thus, the exhilaration and relief of the delivery are often followed by a period of anticlimax and depression, as may be experienced after any long-anticipated achievement." (Pines, 1997).

Fatigue, hypersensitivity, feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, excessive dependence, feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, fear, a sense of change (I am not like I was before), the feeling that "life will never be the same again", lack of energy, loss of interest in life, sex, causeless fears for own health, life and safety of the child can all start chasing the woman. On the somatic level, such a complex emotional state may be accompanied by sleepiness, loss of appetite, tendency to constipation. D. V. Winnicott, a child psychoanalyst, calls a sensitive state of young mothers in the first weeks after delivery "the primary sense of motherhood" and identifies it as a normative condition that resolves on its own (Winnicott, 2004). Given the above, we decided to identify empirically the factors affecting the psycho emotional status of the woman in the postnatal period.

The study is performed based on the Municipal children's polyclinic No. 4 and Antenatal clinic No. 5, city of Odessa, by a solid method, on a voluntary basis.

Many factors that can influence the disharmony of the emotional sphere, have been investigated: - socio-demographic factors; - personality-character traits of the mother; - level of personal and parental anxiety; - subjective assessment of life quality; - mother-to-child ratio; - physiological state of the mother, her stress resistance ability, activity and communication skills.

There were also considered the course of delivery, age of women, presence of senior children, duration of night sleep, marital status etc. The results suggest that unstable psycho-emotional state is found in the early postnatal period (up to 3 months). There is an obvious trend for primipara to exaggerate the complexity of new life circumstances. The obtained results allow saying that the psycho-emotional sphere of women is stabilized and balances back by the time the child turns 1 year.

Conclusions

Summing up the above, we can say the following: postnatal period is accompanied by many changes, both physiological and psychological. Emotional sphere of women in this period is colored with a whole range of both positive and negative emotions. Physiological reasons affecting the psyche of a young mother include the restructuring of her mind, particularly if it is her first delivery in life. The young mother understands that now cannot belong to herself completely, to dispose of her freedom, as well as she is aware of the need for changes in lifestyle, the lifestyle of the family, relations with her husband. When becoming a mom actually at the time of delivery of a baby, the woman does not always immediately and fully realize and accept this new role for herself. This can provoke her anxiety and increased alarm. There can be many reasons for the woman's embarrassment: lack of confidence in the future and in correctness of her own actions; lack of understanding of the child or lack of maternal feelings; self-frustration. The status of a woman is affected by overlapping social conditions, the environment which sheeps in with a small child after the hospital. Support and harmony in the family are very important for young moms at the time.

We see the future research perspective in exploring more trial subjects to determine the factors affecting the emotional state of women. It is also important to define ways for implementation and adaptation of activities for psycho prophylaxis, psycho correction and psychotherapy of pregnant women and families for a better adaptation of "mother-child" system.

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