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**Rates of Maternal Depression Before, During, and After Pregnancy**

Patricia M. Dietz, DrPH, MPH<sup>1</sup>, Selvi B. Williams, MD, MPH<sup>2</sup>, William M. Callaghan, MD<sup>1</sup>,  
Donald J. Bachman, MS<sup>2</sup>, Mark C. Hornbrook, PhD<sup>2</sup>, Evelyn P. Whitlock, MD, MPH<sup>2</sup>,  
F. Carol Bruce, MPH<sup>1</sup>, Cynthia J. Berg, MD, MPH<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Division of Reproductive Health, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, GA

<sup>2</sup>Center for Health Research, Northwest/Hawaii, Kaiser Permanente Northwest, Portland, OR

**Background:** Maternal depression negatively affects quality of life, marital relationships, mother/child bonding, and infant behavior and development. Estimates of the prevalence of maternal depression range from 7% to 24%. While many studies focus on postpartum depression, we sought to understand the prevalence of maternal depression episodes and during which period of pregnancy they occur—before, during, or after. We also examined antidepressant medication dispensings, mental health visits, and the specialty area where depression was first recorded.

**Methods:** Using electronic medical record and administrative data, we identified women who were health plan members between January 1, 1998 and December 31, 2001, who had at least one pregnancy resulting in live birth. For women with more than one pregnancy, we selected the first pregnancy occurring during the study period. Diagnosis of maternal depression included an ICD-9-CM depression diagnosis code or anti-depressant medication dispensed within 30 days of the code for mental disorders specific to pregnancy (648.4). We examined depression diagnosis for three periods—during the 39 weeks prior to the index pregnancy, during pregnancy, and during the 39 weeks post-partum.

**Results:** Among 4,398 women with eligible pregnancies, 15.4% (678) had a depression diagnosis before, during, and/or after pregnancy. The prevalence of diagnoses was 8.7% before, 6.9% during, and 10.4% after pregnancy. Of women with diagnoses before pregnancy, 56.4% also had diagnoses during, and 53.4% had diagnoses after, pregnancy. Of women with diagnoses during pregnancy, 65.6% also had diagnoses after pregnancy. Of women with diagnoses postpartum, 54.2% had diagnoses either before or during pregnancy. Among women who had an indicator for depression during any period, 74.9% were dispensed antidepressant medications. Antidepressant medication dispensings were lowest during pregnancy. Most depression diagnoses were first recorded in primary care (41.7%), followed by mental health (31.4%), Ob-Gyn (13.4%), and other departments (13.4%).

**Conclusions:** Over half of the postpartum depression diagnoses occurred among women who were also diagnosed with depression before or during pregnancy. This suggests that depression diagnosed during the postpartum period may not be a unique condition, but rather a chronic condition exacerbated at a unique period in a woman's life.