

Perceived stigma around postnatal depression still preventing women and men accessing treatment

Despite new research revealing that the Australian public believes there is little or no stigma attached to postnatal depression, the perception of ‘what people think’ can still prevent new mums and dads from seeking timely help.

For World Health Day on 7 April – which the World Health Organisation has used to focus on the mental anguish caused by depression in communities around the world – PANDA has released results from its recent research into community attitudes and understanding about postnatal depression.

PANDA’s research shows there has been an increase in understanding and compassion in the community with 80% of people believing postnatal depression is not a sign of weakness. In addition, 92% of people believe that postnatal depression does not stop a woman from being a good mother.

However, PANDA CEO Terri Smith said the figures suggesting a public acceptance of postnatal depression are not reflected in the feelings of the majority of callers to PANDA’s National Helpline.

“The majority of callers report that they feel shame about how they are feeling,” she says. “And this shame is preventing people from seeking help early.”

“This means more parents are suffering in silence for longer, reducing their enjoyment of what could be a very special time and potentially even putting their lives at risk.”

Smith added that three out of five callers waited more than four weeks to seek help, when it is recommended that people seek help if their symptoms persist for more than two weeks.

“This shows the work still to be done in educating people, partners, supporters and the community to help identify what is happening and in reducing the stigma and shame associated with seeking help,” she said.

“As a community, we need to know the signs and symptoms so people can recognise when someone is unwell and can seek help early,” she said. “You can’t get help if you don’t know something’s wrong.”

Signs of postnatal depression can include feeling constantly sad or crying for no reason, feeling constantly tired, withdrawing from friends, changes in appetite, sleep problems not related to the baby’s needs, difficulty focusing, and having thoughts of death or suicide.



MEDIA RELEASE FOR WORLD HEALTH DAY 2017

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Zoe's story

Zoe experienced severe postnatal depression after her first baby. She was so concerned about perceptions about the illness, and the stigma she would face, that she did not seek help for 11 months.

"I was in denial for a very long time and hid my symptoms from my husband and family. I didn't believe it could happen to me: it was a healthy planned pregnancy, I was in a happy stable marriage and I had no history of mental illness. I had always heard that motherhood was a roller coaster so I thought that it was normal and I was just weak, not good enough and wasn't meant to be a mother. I had suicidal thoughts and thoughts about harming my son. But I was scared of the label of postnatal depression.

I eventually confessed to my husband that I needed to see a doctor and get help as I couldn't handle the daily struggle of frustration, depression and suicidal thoughts. However now I'm recovered and experiencing what I always dreamed motherhood to be."

For more details or to arrange interviews or photography please contact Leticia Brown on 03 9926 9090 or at leticia.brown@panda.org.au

About PANDA

PANDA – Perinatal Anxiety & Depression Australia is a specialist not for profit organisation that has been raising awareness of perinatal anxiety and depression for over 30 years and has helped tens of thousands of Australians get vital information, support and treatment to aid their recovery. PANDA operates Australia's only National Helpline for women, men and families struggling with perinatal anxiety and depression.



PANDA National Helpline
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