



Stigma and Postpartum Depression

CDC research shows that nationally, about 1 in 8 women experience symptoms of postpartum depression. While 80 percent of new moms may experience baby blues during the first two weeks following the birth of their child, postpartum depression impacts 15-20 percent of moms. Left untreated, it can severely impact the family and the development of the child. Yet, stigma often prevents women from speaking up because of guilt and shame.

Michelle Abraham, LCSW-R, assistant director of clinical services, Catholic Charities, describes mild postpartum depression as lack of energy, feeling intense worry and self-doubt. A lot of new mothers question their ability to be a good mother. Feelings of hopelessness or even resentment towards the infant are experienced. Hormonal changes along with a lack of sleep and all the new stresses (financial/social) that come along with having a baby contribute to postpartum.



There are also severe cases of postpartum that includes having symptoms of psychosis (seeing or hearing things that aren't there).

If you are in crisis, please reach out for help:

- Crisis Services is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Call 716-834-3131 and a Crisis Counselor will speak with you.
- Crisis Text Line is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Send a text to 741741 and a Crisis Counselor will respond to you quickly via text.

In addition to postpartum depression, women can experience a wide range of emotional disorders during pregnancy and after birth including anxiety and panic disorder, obsessive compulsive disorders (OCD), and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Perinatal mood and anxiety disorders (PMAD) is a general term used to describe these illnesses.

"New moms are told that this is the best time of their life and to enjoy every minute," Jennifer Urban, LCSW-R, PMH-C, co-founder, and co-director of the WNY Postpartum Connection, Inc., said. "Few people ask moms how they are doing."

"It is hard for a parent to admit to themselves that things aren't going well, let alone admit it to someone else," Urban said. "External messages they might hear include "there must be something wrong with you" and internal expectations can also be a big issue to overcome."

Moms need to be reassured that they are not alone, and that postpartum mental issues are common and treatable. She also points to the negative impact that social media can have when people compare themselves to others and feel that they fall short.

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Postpartum depression is often dismissed by the mother and their family as being related to a lack of sleep. We know that sleep might be a contributing factor, but this is different from the type of sensitivity to emotions one experiences when they are tired.

"We put a lot of pressure on new moms, having a baby is supposed to be a blessing so the mother might invalidate her emotions saying things like 'I shouldn't be sad during this happy time,'" said Abraham.

According to the National Institute of Health, if mood changes and feelings of anxiety or unhappiness are severe, or if they last longer than two weeks, a woman may have postpartum depression. Women with postpartum depression generally will not feel better unless they receive treatment.

Urban says there has been some improvement in reducing the stigma of perinatal mood and anxiety disorders, but there is still a long way to go. We are doing a better job of telling moms they are not alone and it is helpful to have moms reach out to other moms. Prominent celebrities who speak openly about their own struggles can also help change attitudes and encourage conversations.

Supporting Moms and Families

According to Abraham, families and friends should listen without judgement and try not to offer advice. Although it can be tempting it is often invalidating. Humor and distraction are helpful, sometimes new moms feels socially isolated so don't forget that even though your friend had a baby they still need to be invited to things even if they can't join, the invitation helps reduce isolation.

"Believe them when they share feelings, assure them they are still good mothers," Abraham said. "Woman don't hear nearly enough that they are good mothers."

WNY Postpartum Connection, Inc. connects pregnant and postpartum moms and families with the mental health

services they need for a healthy start, to serve as a guide to some of the specialized maternal perinatal health services in our area, to connect professionals who share a commitment to helping moms and families, and to provide advocacy, education, and increased access to care for all.

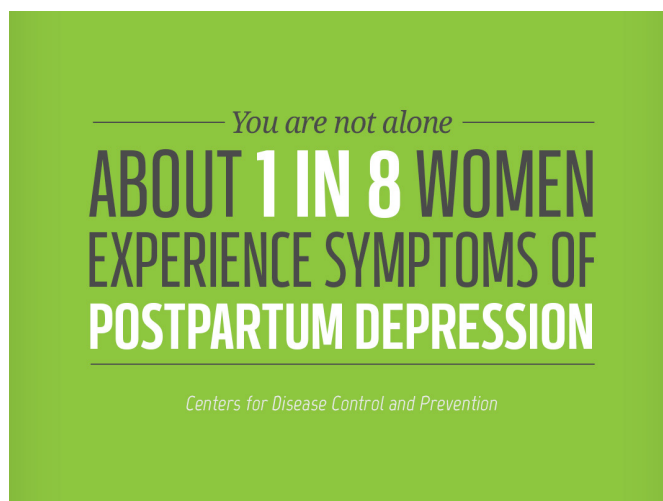
The WNY Postpartum Connection wnypostpartum.com website provides access to more than 125 independent practitioners, agencies, local support groups, supportive programs, and service providers in the community.

Urban suggests asking a new mom "How can I support you and help you?" Remind her that she is not alone, postpartum depression is common, and it is treatable. Many resources exist including counseling and medication. Loved ones can also reach out to providers for guidance.

Additional resources:

- wnypostpartum.com
- letstalkstigma.org/the-resources
- postpartumny.org
- familyhelpcenter.net
(24 – Hour Family Helpline: 716-892-2172)

Find out if you have postpartum depression – visit mind-diagnostics.org/postpartum_depression-test for a self-guided screening test to determine if you need to seek treatment. ■



A Q&A with Gerard Place

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



Gerard Place, located on Buffalo's East Side, provides support and housing for single-parent families that have experienced the pain of poverty, homelessness, and/or domestic/substance abuse. The agency provides the community with a number of services designed to empower individuals through education, employment, vocational training, life skill classes, and counseling.

We spoke with David Zapfel, President/CEO, Gerard Place who shared how Gerard Place clients are impacted by stigma.

Q: Why did your organization become a member of The Anti-Stigma Coalition?

Gerard Place takes great pride in strengthening the community and empowering individuals and families towards self-sufficiency. Joining The Anti-Stigma Coalition allows Gerard Place to have a voice for those who suffer from mental illnesses here on our campus and in the community. Mental illness is often viewed in a negative way because of the attitudes and beliefs toward people who suffer from a mental health condition. Gerard Place is completely aware of the harmful effects of stigma such as the lack of understanding by family, friends, co-workers or others, the reluctance to seek treatment and missing out on opportunities for work, school, or social activities. Being a part of The Anti-Stigma Coalition, we can all work collectively to lessen the stigma that's related to seeking treatment. The goal is to create more awareness on the negative effects that stigma has on those with mental illnesses, maybe people will become more involved by educating themselves in efforts to break down the barrier.

Q: How are people with mental health challenges impacted by stigma?

I think people with mental health challenges are impacted by the stigma in many ways. For example, those with mental health issues may be too embarrassed to seek help or treatment because of the negative connotation associated with having a mental illness. I believe they suffer with self-doubt and shame which often causes isolation and self-judgement. We all have heard of about those stories where individuals are bullied or harassed because of the stigma. I think one of the underlying challenges that is not often talked about is the inadequate health insurance that does not cover mental illness treatment. This is extremely important and it can make a person feel unwilling to get help or treatment because they can't afford it or do not have access to treatment. Also, the idea of being judged alone is enough to deter someone from seeking help. People with mental health issues may let opportunities pass them by because of their mindset of never overcoming certain challenges.

People with Medicaid/Medicare are often treated differently than those with paid health insurance. This could be another way people with mental health challenges are affected by the stigma.

Q: How can the individuals you serve benefit from efforts to eliminate stigma?

We have clients here who suffer from mental illness and I believe they can benefit from efforts to eliminate stigma by realizing they are manageable ways to cope. For starters, seeking the treatment and overcoming that fear. This will open the doors to job opportunity and gaining employment. Another benefit from eliminating stigma would be those being treated better in the community. Again, bringing awareness to this stigma may also teach people how to be more patient and compassionate to those suffering from mental illness. There is a large population of single moms with mental illnesses and by eliminating the stigma, parents could move forward in a less stressful matter. Being a parent, children can notice when something is off. Having that mental stability can lead them to be a better example as a parent showing their children stability. ■



BECOME A MEMBER OF THE ERIE COUNTY ANTI-STIGMA COALITION

Does your organization, church, temple, or community group want to combine forces with our organization? Do you individually want to engage with us to stop the stigma of mental illness? Please consider becoming a member of our Coalition by completing our membership form at letstalkstigma.org/support/pledge.

It is going to take a massive community effort to move the needle on stigma, please become a part of the solution. Questions? Please contact Karl Shallowhorn, Chairperson, at kshallowhorn@chcb.net.

WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST MEMBERS



WNY Postpartum Connection Inc.



CMH COUNSELING

153 West Utica Street, Buffalo, NY 14222 (716)884-7569

Visit letstalkstigma.org/current-members for more information on our current members.

Upcoming Events

September 15

The State of Stigma and Mental Health:
Supporting Your Student's Mental Health
Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition Facebook Live

More Events & Information:

Visit letstalkstigma.org/events

PEOPLE, INC. PROGRAMS

Senior Companion "Phone Connection"

Program Accepting Recipients

Contact: 716.768.2381

Affordable Apartments Accepting Applications

Contact: Email housing@people-inc.org

or call 716.880.3890

Senior Living Apartments Accepting Applications

Contact: Email Seniorliving@people-inc.org

or call 716.817.9090

ERIE COUNTY
ANTI-STIGMA
COALITION

Erie County Anti-Stigma Coalition Founding Members:

BryLin Behavioral Health System • Children's Mental Health Coalition of Western New York, Inc.
Community Partners of Western New York • Compeer • Crisis Services of Erie County
Erie County Department of Mental Health • Erie County Office for People with Disabilities
Fellows Action Network • Fuerst Consulting Corporation • Jewish Family Service of Buffalo & Erie County
The Mental Health Advocates of WNY • Millennium Collaborative Care • Patrick P. Lee Foundation
Preventionfocus, Inc. • Telesco Creative Group • The Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation