

Perinatal Mental Health Training
Modules 11 & 12
Beyond Depression
Case Studies

Case Studies from the “Other perinatal mental health concerns” module part A and part B

Case Study: Major Depressive Disorder

Maria: I have a three month old baby and I have been waiting to feel like myself again, but I don't know whether I'll ever be me again. When I really look back on it, there were some changes during pregnancy. As I became bigger and more uncomfortable, everything in life just felt harder. I was in physical pain a lot of the time, I couldn't sleep well, I felt life as I knew it slowly disappearing. I thought it would get better when I stopped being pregnant and had my baby.

My baby arrived and there were moments of joy, but they felt fleeting. Most of the time I felt in a fog, a dark hole where I didn't exactly feel sad, I just felt nothing. I cried sometimes, other times I just felt empty. I saw others around me experiencing life as they always had and didn't know if I would ever feel that again. My baby was fussy and it seemed that everyone else could calm her better than I could. Getting something done in the day, even a simple shopping errand, felt impossible. It was so hard to find the right time to leave the house when the baby wasn't napping or needing to be changed, to get all of our things together, and once I got there I couldn't even make small decisions about what ingredients to buy for a meal. I was having trouble sleeping, laying there in bed even when my baby was sleeping, and I'd forget to eat because nothing seemed appetizing anyway. I had the life I had been wanting, I just couldn't figure out why it all felt so difficult and empty.

Case Study: Psychotic Features

Iris: My wife, Iris, changed very suddenly after our daughter was born. She began to withdraw into her own world and didn't want anything to do with the baby, she wasn't even interested in holding or feeding her. She became less and less communicative and more confused and suspicious. She even looked at me with suspicion in her eyes. She told me that she had to stay awake all night because she knew that there was a plan for someone to come during the night to take our baby. I got so worried that I call her OB doctor and was told to take her to the hospital immediately.

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Case Study: Bipolar Disorder

Justine: I have to say, I sort of loved my manic episode at the time, but I have come to realize that the results can be devastating. It started a few weeks after my baby was born. I thought to myself, “I don’t know why other women say this is so hard, I have all the energy in the world”. I didn’t need to sleep at all, so it wasn’t a big deal that the baby was up a lot at night. I was so productive, creating art, cleaning the house, doing exercise videos. I felt like I could do anything. I wanted my baby to have everything she deserved, so I went to the store and bought a thousand dollars of baby clothes, toys to last her through preschool, everything I thought she could possibly want. Just as suddenly as it began, it crashed, and I felt the deepest and most despairing depression that I could imagine. I couldn’t get out of bed, I could barely talk. I was on a rollercoaster that I didn’t know how to get off of.

Case Study: Postpartum Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Theresa: A few weeks after my baby was born, I began to get awful images of him being harmed. Once, when I was folding laundry, I got an image of my baby suffocating in the laundry basket. I couldn’t do laundry after that, because what if I didn’t know and my baby was in there? I also couldn’t give him baths, because all I could think of was him slipping under the water and drowning. Although I didn’t think I would ever really hurt by baby son, I never trusted myself alone with him. I was terrified I would “snap” and actually carry out one of these scary thoughts.

Case Study: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Cindy: I had so many dreams for the birth experience that I wanted, and did everything that I could to prepare. Instead, of getting the birth that I’d hoped for, it became a nightmare. As the labor got longer and stalled out, more and more medical interventions were needed. It was all happening so fast and I felt terrorized and vulnerable. I thought I had already dealt with the abuse in my childhood. It seemed that all the years of therapy were a waste of time and money. Since the birth, I keep having flashbacks and nightmares. They feel so real — like it’s happening over and over again. I can’t leave my baby alone for a minute, even with my husband. I get the sick feeling that I can’t even trust him. Whenever anyone asks me how the birth went I just shut down, and when they say “at least your baby is healthy” I feel so full of rage. I even resent my baby sometimes, even though I know it’s irrational, because she is the one who put me through that horrible experience.

Case Study: Borderline Personality Disorder

Tracy: It’s just me and my baby at home, I can’t really count on anyone else when it comes down to it. Her dad is around once in while, we’re pretty on and off. Sometimes I get so mad at him I can’t see straight and I tell him to get out of my life. Then he leaves and I feel so alone

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that I text and call until I can get him to acknowledge me and this baby he should be responsible for. My Delia, she is my sunshine though. There is no one in the world that makes me feel loved and important like she does. Although when she's crying and won't stop and I don't know what to do, those are some of my darkest hours. And she's starting to crawl away and get into things, and she'll give me these sassy looks sometimes like she thinks she doesn't have to listen to me. Sometimes I know I can do anything I put my mind to, and sometimes I feel like the worst mother in the world. Once in a while, when I feel really dark and overwhelmed I cut myself, it helps me get through when all I really want to do is disappear.