

Perinatal Depression: A Systematic Review of Prevalence and Incidence

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The term “perinatal depression” describes major and minor depressive episodes that occur during pregnancy or within the first year after delivery. In the United States, the rate of perinatal depression ranges from 5% to more than 25%. Characteristics of assessments to detect perinatal depression include the method, timing, and population; variation in some of these characteristics may account for the wide range in the percentages. The wide range illustrates the uncertainty in calculating precise estimates of incidence and prevalence of perinatal depression and determining the screening accuracy of the assessment instruments.



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Our study found that, during the combined period of pregnancy to 3 months after delivery, as many as 19.2% of women have a depressive episode and 7.1% have a major depressive episode; most episodes have onset following delivery. Statistically, the estimates showed considerable uncertainty; thus, they may not represent the true prevalence levels within the population. Additionally, we could not develop estimates of the relative incidence of depression when comparing pregnant and postpartum women with women at nonchildbearing times.

Our findings addressed gaps in the available literature on (1) the incidence and prevalence of perinatal depression, (2) the accuracy of perinatal depression screening tools, and (3) the effectiveness of screening and subsequent interventions to improve maternal and child outcomes. We emphasized the need for a better understanding of how differences in racial and ethnic populations affect the prevalence and incidence rates of perinatal depression. More studies, with larger and more diverse samples, once conducted, can adequately guide national policy to improve maternal and child outcomes for women suffering from perinatal depression.

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