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Protective Factors Against Perinatal Depression During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Approximately one in five pregnant or expecting mothers experience perinatal depression, and recent data suggest that perinatal depression has only increased during the COVID-19 pandemic (Gustafsson et al., 2021). However, internal psychological factors, such as mindfulness and emotion regulation, and social support can reduce depressive symptoms (Desrosiers et al., 2013; Dryman & Heimburg, 2018; Xie et al., 2009). The current study sought to understand how emotion regulation, mindfulness, and social support may influence perinatal depression during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants ($n = 601$; 80% White, 8% Asian, 5% Hispanic/Latin; mean age = 32.93 years) recruited during pregnancy ($n = 474$) or during the first year postpartum ($n = 152$) shared information about their feelings and experiences related to the COVID-19 pandemic (Coronavirus and Perinatal Experiences Questionnaire; COPE) and symptoms of depression (Center for Epidemiologic Studies of Depression-Revised Questionnaire). This study focused on subsamples of the study population who additionally completed surveys about their social support networks (Social Support Questionnaire; $n = 493$), mindfulness (Five Factor Mindfulness Survey; $n = 305$), and emotion regulation (Emotion Regulation Questionnaire; $n = 332$). As expected, participants who were more negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic experienced greater symptoms of perinatal depression ($p < 0.0001$). However, this association was moderated by level of mindfulness ($p < 0.001$), and by social support ($p < 0.0001$), such that the association between negative impact of the pandemic and symptoms of depression differed depending on individual differences in these two factors. Emotion regulation did not significantly moderate this interaction, but it is worth noting that cognitive reappraisal was negatively correlated with perinatal depression ($p < 0.01$). This study indicates the importance of considering protective factors against perinatal depression, including internal psychological states and external supports, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

References

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