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Need for psychological counseling for pregnancy during COVID-19 pandemic: A mini review

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Abstract

Pregnant women during the COVID-19 pandemic were more vulnerable which had more psychological impact on them because of reduced social interactions and daily routines. The impacts of COVID-19 on the mental health of pregnant women were remarkable due to their prone to psychological disorders during the pregnancy period. There are some recommendations to reduce the likelihood of psychological disorders during the COVID-19 pandemic including "attention to previous mental problems of pregnant women", "screening of patients in need of psychological counseling in the first trimester of pregnancy", "providing various psychological programs according to the mothers' request, including booklets, brochures, videos and online sessions", "special contact numbers for psychological consultants for psychological emergencies of mothers" and "training the husbands of pregnant women according to the needs of mothers.

Keywords: COVID-19, psychology, counseling, pregnancy

Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the world was affected by the infection and death of millions of people, and according to reports, this virus has affected many organs of the body, including lung, kidney, liver, eye, and skin, which has more physical dimension and even depression and other psychological problems which is the non-physical dimension ^[1-6]. Meanwhile, during the COVID-19 pandemic, pregnant women were more vulnerable which had more psychological impact on them because of reduced social interactions and daily routines ^[7,8].

Pneumonia is an important cause of death among pregnant women following COVID-19 development. Since pregnant women experience physiological changes in their immune and cardiopulmonary systems, they are susceptible to severe disease after respiratory viral infection. Premature rupture of membranes (PROM), loss of intrauterine fetus and death of babies are among the most common adverse consequences of maternal pneumonia ^[9]. Research showed that COVID-19 can also lead to adverse fetal effects, including intrauterine growth restriction, premature birth, spontaneous abortion, and even fetal death. New data shows that pregnant women experience more severe illness following infection with the COVID-19 compared to their non-pregnant counterparts. There is also some evidence of damage to the placenta in women infected with COVID-19 during pregnancy, the clinical significance of which is unknown ^[10]. It seems that the infection of pregnant women with COVID-19 can increase the severity of the pregnancy-related disease and its complications and endanger the health of the mother and the fetus. Physiological changes in the immune and cardiopulmonary systems of pregnant women can play an important role in this regard. It was found that PROM complication is found in 30% of pregnant women with COVID-19 ^[11]. Since pregnancy is associated with an increase in coagulopathy and this condition can occur with an increase in thrombin production and an increase in intravascular inflammation, therefore, pregnant women with COVID-19 may have more risk factors for thrombosis ^[12]. In addition, due to fluctuating regulation of the immune system during pregnancy, pregnant women in the first and third trimesters are in a pro-inflammatory state and can be more exposed to severe inflammation and cytokine storm of COVID-19 infection and increase the death rate in this disease ^[13].

Besides, pre-eclampsia in pregnancy that is characterized by high blood pressure and proteinuria and is associated with significant maternal complications (stroke, cardiac arrest, kidney failure, liver failure) and fetus (intrauterine growth restriction, premature birth, stillbirth) has higher rate in hospitalized pregnant women with COVID-19 development [14].

As mentioned, lots of physical changes during pregnancy and risk of COVID-19 in pregnancy led to high stress in the pregnant women.

COVID-19 quarantine measures on mothers are accompanied by psychological consequences [15]. We know that the physiological and psychological health of mothers and their children during pregnancy, a sensitive period for mothers, can be affected by stressful events and anxiety [16, 17]. The impacts of COVID-19 on the mental health of pregnant women were remarkable because they are prone to psychological disorders during the pregnancy period [18].

Normally, the prevalence of psychological disorders is up to 10% in pregnant women but it was increased during the COVID-19 pandemic especially depression and stress anxiety [19]. In Italy, Ravaldi et al. reported that having previous psychological disorders worsen the psychological effects of COVID-19 on pregnant women [8]. As Yu et al. in China reported, pregnancy is a stressful challenge for women and even their family members so perceived social support is an important factor to keep pregnant women satisfied because stress and anxiety lower their life satisfaction and lead them to depression [20]. In Iran, Effati-Daryani et al. revealed that 32-43% of pregnant women had symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress [21].

Effati-Daryani et al. reported that anxiety was more than depression and stress in Iranian pregnant women during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as they indicated that three factors of marital life satisfaction, support by spouse and education level affect the level of psychological disorders in pregnant women [21]. According to the importance of the mentioned issue, necessary interventions including physiological and mental health for pregnant women in the COVID-19 epidemic must be planned, and one of the most important interventions is virtual or face-to-face psychological counseling sessions [7, 22]. Gynecologists and obstetricians and health policymakers of every country should realize that in the COVID-19 pandemic, along with isolation, quarantine measures and restrictions, the emotional health of pregnant women is more overshadowed than other strata, and efficient decisions in this field are needed [19].

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, gynecologists and obstetricians should make use of the Internet and virtual media fits every country to teach pregnant women about the advantages of epidemic prevention, controlling health education, and popularizing science [22].

Conclusion

Screening of patients in need of psychological counseling in the first trimester of pregnancy can be considered to reduce the risk of psychological disorders during the COVID-19 pandemic in pregnant women. Assessment and attention to previous mental problems of pregnant women are of great importance. Providing various psychological programs according to the mothers' request, including booklets, brochures, videos and online sessions along with training of the husbands of pregnant women according to the needs of

mothers are an effective strategy to inhibit psychological disorders. It is suggested to consider special contact numbers for psychological consultants for psychological emergencies of pregnant women.

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