PROJECT INFORMATION

November 2020

Testing the Effectiveness of Adding Group Therapy to Home Visiting Services on Reducing Postpartum Depression in Women with Low Incomes

Principal investigator

Darius Tandon, PhD

Organization

Northwestern University

What was the research about?

Postpartum depression is a mental health problem that affects up to 20 percent of women after they have a baby. Women with postpartum depression may have trouble sleeping, feel anxious or sad, and have problems bonding with their babies. Postpartum depression is more common in women with low incomes than it is in women with high incomes.

In this study, the research team wanted to learn if adding a group therapy program called Mothers and Babies, or MB, to home visiting services could reduce depression symptoms. MB included six weekly group sessions given in a public location. Sessions focused on positive thinking, enjoying activities, and social support.

The research team also wanted to know if MB worked as well when community health workers, or CHWs, led sessions as when mental health providers led them. Mental health providers had advanced degrees in mental health; CHWs didn't. Having CHWs provide MB may increase access to mental health care for moms.

What were the results?

After six months, women in MB and women with home visiting services alone had similar decreases in depression symptoms. They also didn't differ in how likely they were to

- Have depression
- Be able to change their mood or behavior
- Know that sad thoughts would pass
- Feel like they had social support

MB groups led by CHWs weren't better or worse at reducing depression symptoms than groups led by mental health providers.

Who was in the study?

The study included 824 women enrolled in 37 home visiting programs in seven midwestern states. Of these women, 44 percent were Black, 30 percent were White, 20 percent were Hispanic, 1 percent were Asian, less than 1 percent were Native American, and 4 percent were more than one race or ethnicity. The average age was 26, and 71 percent earned less than \$25,000 a year.

What did the research team do?

The research team assigned each home visiting program to one of three groups by chance. The team assigned women to the same group as their home visiting program.

Women in all three groups received home visiting services. The services provided information about birth and caring for babies. One group also received

---

MB led by mental health providers. The second group received MB led by CHWs. The third group received home visiting services alone.

Women filled out surveys at the start of the study, one week after MB ended, and again 12 and 24 weeks after their baby was born.

Mothers, counselors, patient advocates, policy makers, and community leaders gave input throughout the study.

What were the limits of the study?

Overall, women in this study had mild symptoms of depression when the study started. Results may have been different for women with severe depression.

Future research could look at whether women who have worse depression benefit more from MB.

How can people use the results?

Home visiting programs could use these results when considering ways to prevent and treat postpartum depression.

To learn more about this project, visit www.pcori.org/Tandon268.