

This is a list of discussion questions to help you think about some of the issues brought up in the narratives. Please note that not every discussion question will be applicable to each of the narratives.

1. How might culture and religion have an impact on the woman's depression and her response to it?
2. What thoughts do the woman and her family have about traditional beliefs, practices or healers? Which thoughts may conflict with the provider's beliefs or practices?
3. What is working for this woman? What strengths does she have that you can build on as a provider?
4. What effect does the woman's family have on her mental health and her response to her depression? How might you engage the family to help with the healing process?
5. What issues might a more acculturated woman be faced with (e.g., struggling between Western views and traditional ones; fighting with traditional parents; adapting to perceived "American" habits)?

Discussion Questions

6. What is the woman's perception of support?
7. What expectations do parents and providers bring to the therapeutic relationship?
8. Were there unexpected outcomes, such as a birth complication?
9. Was the woman screened for depression? At what points could she have been screened?
10. What screening tools could be used?
11. What if the woman is breastfeeding or pregnant and wants medication?
12. What barriers exist that may have affected the woman's ability to access help for her prenatal or postpartum depression (e.g., cultural/systemic, financial, geographic, knowledge, insurance, stigma)?
13. What referral resources are available?
14. What if the woman doesn't have insurance? What if the woman is undocumented?
15. Is the health care delivery system responsive to this woman's needs?
16. What have you, as a provider, done for women to support their daily activities? (This could address screening, engaging women to get treatment, or providing culturally competent care.) What might you try now?
17. What can you, as a provider, do to help this woman feel better about her situation?
18. How do you engage a woman to seek treatment once she has been identified as having prenatal or postpartum depression?
19. How can you modify your practice to help accommodate a woman's beliefs?

Voices of Experience:

A collection of culturally-specific first-person narratives about perinatal depression





This booklet provides six first-person narratives about perinatal depression. Five of the narratives are written from the perspectives of women from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, including African American, American Indian, Amish, Hmong and Latino. In addition, the last narrative is about a woman whose cultural or ethnic background is unknown. It is designed to bring out issues that may be universal to the experience of perinatal depression. These narratives are all based on interviews with women from diverse backgrounds or providers who work closely with them. Though

Introduction

fictional, these first-person narratives bring out the lived experiences of women in a way that a strictly clinical presentation could not.

The narratives presented here are most effective when read aloud. After reading the narratives, it may be beneficial to review the list of discussion questions provided at the end of the booklet. These questions may help you think about some of the important issues that surface in the narratives as well as issues that may surface in your daily practice.

It is important to note that the narratives are not meant to generalize about women from a particular culture or ethnic group and are not meant to apply to every woman within each of these cultures. First and foremost, individualized care should be emphasized. Every woman experiences prenatal and postpartum depression in a unique way. However, there are some issues that affect how a woman deals with depression that may be directly related to her cultural beliefs. These narratives are meant to give providers an idea about some of the cultural issues that may affect how a

woman responds to and deals with depression. In addition, the narratives touch upon other issues that may affect women from any culture, such as access to care, supportive relationships, and unexpected birth outcomes.

Although the narratives provide some information about different cultures, they are by no means comprehensive. You may serve women from a myriad of cultures that may not be represented here. You can learn about a woman's particular beliefs by discussing racial and ethnic similarities and differences at every opportunity and by being alert to and responding to culturally based cues. Understanding another's culture is a continuous and not a discrete process.

– Jen Wilen, M.P.H.



PERINATAL FOUNDATION

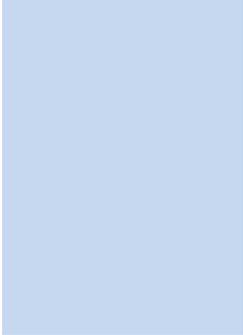
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I can't talk long because my friend is waiting for me in the car with my kids. She has to go to work, so if I'm late, I'm going to have to get on the bus with my kids – do you have any bus tickets in case I need them? I hate to ask you because I haven't seen you in such a long time, but you were always such a good friend to me.

I haven't talked with this baby's father since before Thanksgiving. He'll want me back though as soon as I drop this weight I've gained. My mother and sisters tell me I shouldn't care about him anymore – he never treated me right. They say they'll help take care of me now...when they can, you know. My mother used to help

African American Woman

me watch the kids, but she had to go back to work, so now I'm here watching them by myself. My mother, she's got enough trouble of her own, but she still gives me what she can. Having to take care of these kids by myself has really put me in a bind though. I've been trying to go back to school to get my G.E.D. – working during the day and going to classes at night - but that's not going to happen now, not unless I can find someone else to watch my babies. I really liked school, too; I was good at it. My mother and sisters, they just keep telling me to pray and the Lord will help us, so I'm trying. I could sure use some help.

They started doing cutbacks at work, too, so of course I was one of the first to go. You know, now that I got laid off, I bet I'll have to get food stamps again. The church ladies help out, they bring food and stuff for the kids sometimes, but they can't come over more than once a week.

They know I'm having a hard time since I got laid off and having this new baby and everything. They've been so good to me...I just hate the thought of having to get those food stamps though, but how will I eat with no money? I still haven't even paid off my last bill from the hospital.

That's kind of why I didn't go see the doctor when I got pregnant again; I was scared they were going to make me pay up. Plus, I didn't want to hear that anything was wrong, you know? After my last little baby died, I was just so scared there'd be something wrong with this one, too. I was just so thankful when I actually got pregnant again. I've had two miscarriages plus losing my last baby, so I didn't think the Lord meant for me to have any more babies. I guess I was wrong though. My little boy seems OK too, so that tells me that everything will be fine.

You know, I wouldn't have gone back to that doctor again even if I did have the money. He wanted me to get my tubes tied. Plus, every time I used to go to that doctor, I had to wait in the lobby for sometimes two hours. Then, when it was my turn, he would spend no more than five minutes with me. I don't know why you're even supposed to go see the doctor. He just does his exam and doesn't even tell you if there's something wrong; he just says, "Cut down on the salt 'cause your feet are swollen. See you next month."

They keep asking me if I'm "depressed" or sad. If I say "yes," they might try to take my kids away. If I say "no," then they just keep asking me because they say I'm so quiet and I never look at them when they talk to me. They want me to open the curtains, but I can see the TV better when it's dark in here. Plus the baby sleeps longer. They just don't get it. I don't want to keep answering all of their questions. So many people keep coming to the house to see me and my baby - social workers and nurses, and they keep bringing these students with them and they just sit and look at me. I'm just tired of seeing people. I don't know, maybe I am depressed, but what could they do about my problems anyway?

– *Based on interview with Kelli Jones, R.N., B.S.N.*



One Week Postpartum

I didn't want this baby at first. I don't know how to take care of a kid. Plus, I don't have any money. So when I first got pregnant, I thought about that all the time, but after a while, you just accept it, you know? No big deal I guess.

But besides that, being pregnant was OK until after about five months when I started getting sick...weird sick, you know? Not like the flu. My chest started hurting, my heart was pounding so hard all the time, and I was always out of breath. I thought it was just all the smoke from work and all the drunken gamblers driv-

American Indian Woman

ing me crazy, but even after I stopped going to work, I still felt sick. My mother told me to go see our shaman, but I found a ride to the doctor, so I went there instead. Only because I actually got in with a woman. I don't want no white man anywhere near me or this baby, but I figured a woman isn't as bad. Who knows though? She said she couldn't find anything wrong with me. Maybe I should've just gone to the shaman.

The birth itself was good except for my mother. She kept yelling at the nurses for stupid reasons – just kept screaming at them. I couldn't get her to shut her mouth; it was so humiliating. She's always trying to run my life. She drinks too much, too. The nurses finally had to take her away. Anyway, I had the baby without any drugs, so that was good. And now that the baby's here, I'm

fine. The baby seems fine, too. We got the first pair of moccasins. It's breastfeeding and everything, too. My husband came in to cut the cord, and we kept it to put in the baby's medicine pouch. We wanted to keep the whole placenta to tie it to the tree behind our house, but the doctor threw it away.

So yea, I'm fine. The only thing is my husband...but he's OK, too. He just gets so angry when he's drinking, that's all. He doesn't mean it I don't think. It's hard, you know? I don't know how we're going to pay for the hospital. We don't have any money, and I don't know if I'm a very good mother. That probably makes my husband upset, too. I know we're going to have a strong marriage eventually. We only just got married right before the baby came, so it hasn't been that long. He'll stop after a while, I'm sure. Soon these bruises will go away like nothing ever happened.

Ten Weeks Postpartum

Why do you think I took all those pills? I couldn't do it. I told you I couldn't be a good mother. There was something wrong with the baby. There was always something wrong with the baby. It was my fault; I didn't know what to do. At the birth, I felt like my body just knew what to do, but after the baby was here, that was all gone. I thought that after a while, everything would be OK, but it wasn't. Every second I asked myself, "Is the baby OK? Is it going to die?" I couldn't help it. So I took the pills because I thought the baby would be better off if I wasn't here...Maybe things will be better now though. I've been in this "crazy house" for a month already – it seems like ten years. Tomorrow I get to go home to my husband though, and everything will be OK again. I'm sure it'll all be fine.

– *Based on interviews with Melonee Montano and Joyce Goglin, C.N.M., M.S.N., R.N.*

35 Weeks Pregnant

"Not to speak of."

"No, not really."

"OK, thank you. Good-bye."

Well, that will be the last time I go see that doctor with his crazy Western ways. Doesn't he know that the things he speaks of are in God's hands? Even if I was feeling out of sorts, if you will, that

would have nothing to do with him. A woman depressed is obviously a woman who has failed her faith.

Amish Woman

And ridiculing me for coming to him only a month before the baby is born! Well, if he wants to pay for these visits, that would be a different story. We certainly don't have the means. And what's the point anyway? This child is in God's hands.

I suppose he was trying to help by offering to come to the house to do his visits, but what would I say to the neighbors? And what would I do with the children? They're too young yet to know about any of this business. No, no, no...I think I'll just call the midwife when the time comes.

Three Weeks Postpartum

"It's so good of you to come. You and Joseph, you know, my husband, were just wonderful for the birth, so much better than that doctor would have been, I'm sure. Yes, my mother came over right

away, and we've had one of my nieces living here with us since the birth, as well. She's a bit young yet, but she's good with the other children and the housework. She's back to my sister's next week, and I will miss her, but I feel rested to be sure."

Twelve Weeks Postpartum

"I just can't have church at our house this week. I feel as if I just couldn't manage it. My sisters are supposed to come over tomorrow to help me with the preparations, but I'm not sure how to manage even with their fine hands to assist me. How could I possibly ask someone else to have church this weekend though? I would never live down the shame."

"No, I don't feel depressed, not to speak of."

"Well, yes, I suppose the children are a bit of a mess and the dishes need to be washed."

"No, I don't really sleep, but I lie in bed a lot and listen to my thoughts, which seem to never tire of invading my mind. I went to the healer yesterday, and he gave me some herbs, but I'm still having that trouble. I will just pray to God for His aid."

– Based on an interview with Gretchen Spicer, C.P.M.



You want to ask me about having my children? I don't like to talk about it, but I will tell you something. My first child, he is gone now. We had to leave our village in Laos, and the spirits took him when we crossed the river to go to Thailand. I was so careful while I was pregnant, too; I never went near a river or landslide where the spirits like to be to avoid them striking me or my baby. I never carried heavy things or reached up high. But when we had to leave our village and go to the refugee camp, the spirits struck him anyway. I was not allowed to have a proper burial ceremony

Hmong Woman

for him, even though he was old enough, because it would have taken too long, and we had to keep going. So my son's spirit is still

wandering at the river; it can't get permission to reenter the womb. This makes me sad all the time, and I cry.

That was a long time ago though. My next two children, they were born in the refugee camp. They don't remember very much, and I tell them it is better that way because the camp was such a bad place – we were so sad to leave our village and in the camp, it is very crowded and dirty. It is better for them here, but I wish they could grow up in our village.

I had my next three children here in America. My last one, she is just a couple of months old. If it were up to me, I would be finished having children, but my husband, he wants more. The spirits struck my first son, and all I have now is daughters. So I need a son and many children to take care of us when we are old. Now I am so tired with this last baby though, and I just want to die.

My friends and I, we don't talk about it much, but sometimes a young woman will say, "I don't understand why I have very short temper." Then an older woman will tell her, "We all women. We all wear the same shoe." I still think it's nice though when a young woman says she feels upset and she doesn't understand, because that is how I feel, too.

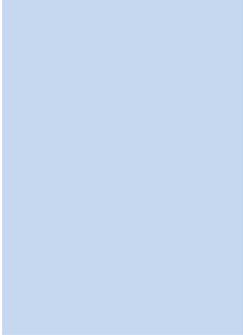
Most of these women though, they have babies, and they feel better in a couple weeks. Me though, I have felt sick for a very long time. This is because my spirit has left me, and it cannot get back.

When I was pregnant with this baby, I was so careful, but then I had a very long labor, and the baby did not want to come out. My husband took me to the hospital and they told me they were going to make me fall asleep so they could cut the baby out. My English is not very good, and I don't understand why they had to do this, but my husband called our house and had my father ask the ancestors to guide me through this journey I was going to take. But the ancestors must not have been listening because when the doctors cut me open, one of my souls escaped. They told my husband he could not be with me, so he could not tell my soul to come with me to the recovery room. So when I woke up in a different room, my soul was lost.

I went to my shaman to ask for his help, and he wanted to call my soul back, but the hospital would not let us take the chicken inside the operating room for the ceremony. So how can I get my soul back without the sacrifice? It will be lost forever, just like my son's soul, and now I just want to die.

Now I always have bad dreams that I am wandering far away, and I cannot find where I am going. These dreams wake me up, and then I cannot sleep anymore. In the day, I cry because my soul is lost. I cannot even look at my baby, so my family took her away to take care of her. They know that something is wrong, but what can they do?

– *Based on an interviews with Dia Vang, Shua Vang, R.N., and Arthur Upham, Ph.D.; "Childbirth and soul loss: the case of a Hmong woman" by Rice, Ly & Lumley; "When the baby falls! The cultural construction of miscarriage among Hmong women in Australia" by Rice; and "Death in birth: The cultural construction of stillbirth, neonatal death, and maternal death among Hmong women in Australia" by Rice*



I think there's something wrong with the air; it's too windy here. Maybe that's why I don't feel so good. Maybe I got sick after the baby was born. Those illnesses can come right up into you, you know? Or maybe someone gave me the Evil Eye, and I didn't even know it. Something's not right though. It wasn't like this after my other babies were born. But that was in my village in Mexico. It's so much warmer there.

You know what else is different? People don't treat you right here. They look at you like flies in the milk. The women, they say to me, "You're so young! How do you have three children and a baby already?" They sound so nice, but then they look at me and my children like we're dirt, like we shouldn't be in their country. They're probably just jealous though because they're all old maids.

Latina Woman

And I miss my family. I didn't even get my *quarantina* after Josephina was born. In Mexico, you know, my sister would've taken care of me and Josephina for 40 days after she was born. Oh, I was so happy having my little babies in Mexico. But here, there was no one around to take care of us. Just my husband, and he works all night and comes home to sleep all day. So it's me who has to take care of Josephina, keep her quiet while my husband sleeps. Otherwise he gets angry. Plus I have to take care of the house and the other kids all by myself...*Dios mio*, it makes me wish I had never left.

It's better here though, I guess. My husband makes good money, and we have food to eat. The children are all fat here, too, and healthy. Josephina will be healthier than her sisters and brothers were back home. I still think there's something wrong with me though, so maybe the children are healthier, but the women are all sick. I sleep all the time and just can't get out of bed. I listen to my baby crying, and I try to get out of bed, but it's so hard, like something's pulling me down. My babies though, they need me, so hopefully this sickness will leave me alone soon.

At least Josephina is OK. We actually found a *patera* who helped me deliver her. I was so worried about the delivery, so I'm so glad we found her. My husband wouldn't let me go to the hospital, you know, it's too expensive. Plus, who knows what they would've done? It's hard here, but I don't want to go back to Mexico, and I'm sure they would've sent me back. It's all OK though since we found the *patera*. She was good, too, just like back home. And she treated me right, you know? I heard that these American doctors want to feel up inside you. Well, I don't want that so I'm glad I found my *patera*. She knew to wrap up the baby so she doesn't get chills and wrap the belly button with cloth strips so it doesn't stick out. Maybe American doctors do that, too, but I don't know for sure.

Anyway, now I ask God that He helps me get better. That's all that I can do, you know? He brought us here and brought us Josephina and our other three beautiful children. He gave my husband work. He'll make me better, too. I just have to be patient.

– *Based on interviews with Ramona Schwan, Mary Lynn Bennett and Rosina Wundrock*



“How am I doing?” Hmm...how *am* I doing? Depends on what time of day you ask, I guess. Right now I’m feeling...tired mostly, maybe a little down. Not really depressed, not right now, but like I said, ask me in five minutes, and I may say something totally different. In five minutes, I may even be crying – you never know. One minute I’m fine, and the next I just lose it. My whole family’s got issues with depression, so I guess it’s no surprise that I’m like this. I just didn’t expect it to come after the baby was born of all times. I mean, this is supposed to be the best time in my life, right?

Woman of Unspecified Culture

I guess I should start from the beginning. My pregnancy was great, except for the morning sickness, but you always go through that, no big deal. My husband was really nice to me. I guess he didn’t want to hurt the baby, you know? He would get upset when I was late with dinner or couldn’t keep one of the other kids quiet, but all in all, he was pretty sweet. I guess I got kind of used to it. He’s back to his old self though, now that the baby’s born.

After I first realized I was pregnant, it took me a while to get in to see the doctor. The woman on the phone just kept saying there was nothing they could do right now and I should call again after 12 weeks. Then when I called back after what I guessed was 12 weeks, they said they didn’t take my insurance. So I had to look around for a while and ended up getting in even later. What a nightmare....

When I finally did get in to see someone, the doctor raised her eyebrows a bit when she found out I hadn't been taking any "prenatal vitamins." Well, if I had gotten an appointment when I wanted one, and if they weren't so fussy about what insurance they take, she could've told me that a long time ago, now couldn't she have?

I started having contractions three days after my due date. I really wanted a natural birth - no drugs, no cutting, no nothing - but after I was pushing for what seemed like ten years, the nurses said my baby's heart rate started to drop. So the doctor decided to take him out with a vacuum. I thought that was bad enough, but it turns out that was only the beginning. After the baby was born, they grabbed him away quick as they could and rushed him to some table on the other side of the room so I couldn't even see him. Next thing I know, they've got him on oxygen. Then two days later they tell me something's wrong with his heart and he has to have surgery!

So of course, I was worried about him. Even now, four months later, I feel my eyes welling up just talking about it. And he's doing fine now, he really is. It was just so hard, you know? And scary. It's funny though because while that whole thing was going on, I actually felt pretty good; it was like I didn't even have time to think about myself because I was just so worried about the baby. It was only afterwards that I started feeling so down. I started having trouble sleeping then, too; I was just so worried.

When I went in for a follow-up appointment, I pretty much broke down. My doctor gave me the name of a counselor and said it would probably be good if I went to see him, so I did. The counselor said I should talk to my doctor about going on antidepressants, which really scares me. I'm trying to breastfeed so I'm worried about that. Plus, I'm worried about how these drugs will change me. Will I be a different person? Will I need to take them forever? I don't want to have to take drugs to be OK, you know? I mean, I'm not crazy. Only really messed up people have to take medication to feel better. I'm not one of those people. And what about money? Even if I did agree to do this, I bet those pills are expensive, and I don't know if my insurance will cover them. I haven't even talked to my husband about it yet. I don't know if he'll even let me get on medication.

So I don't know what to do. I just want to feel like myself again. And I just want to stop crying.