Elevated Perinatal Depression during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A National Study among Jewish and Arab Women in Israel

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Abstract

This study assessed the prevalence of perinatal depression symptoms (PNDS) during the COVID-19 pandemic among Arab and Jewish women in Israel and identified COVID-19-related risk factors for PNDS while comparing Arab and Jewish women. The sample included 730 perinatal women (604 Jewish and 126 Arab) aged 19–45 years, who filled out an online self-report questionnaire. The questionnaire assessed several areas: perinatal experiences and exposure to COVID-19, social support, and financial and emotional impact. PNDS was measured by the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS). The prevalence of PNDS (EPDS ≥ 10) in the entire study population was 40.0%. Prevalence among Arab women was significantly higher compared to Jewish women (58% vs. 36%, PV < 0.001). Higher PNDS were significantly associated with anxiety symptoms (GAD ≥ 10) (PV < 0.001), stress-related to COVID-19 (PV < 0.001), adverse change in delivery of healthcare services (PV = 0.025), and unemployment (PV = 0.002). PNDS has elevated more than twofold during COVID-19 in Israel. Such high rates of PNDS may potentially negatively impact women, and fetal and child health development. This situation requires special attention from public health services and policymakers to provide support and mitigation strategies for pregnant and postpartum women in times of health crises.

Keywords: COVID-19; pandemic; perinatal; pregnancy; postpartum; depression