Prevalence, trajectories, and risk factors for depression among caregivers of young children involved in child maltreatment investigations

Heather Ringeisen, Ph.D.
Director, Children and Families Program
Survey Research Division
March 9, 2010

Presentation Overview

- Overview of the impact of maternal depression in young child development
- Description of the NSCAW study
  - Sample, measures, design
- Summarize findings related to maternal depression and young children reported for maltreatment
  - Prevalence of symptoms, change over time, correlates

Why Focus on Maternal Depression?

- 9.5 percent of the population, or about 18.8 million American adults, suffer from a depressive illness
- Most people with a depressive illness do not seek treatment
- Women lifetime risk: 10-25%, point prevalence: 5-9%
- 12-18% of mothers of young children are estimated to suffer from symptoms consistent with depression

Symptoms of Depression

- Twice as likely in women
- Persistent sad, anxious
- Feelings of hopelessness, pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness
- Loss of interest
- Decreased energy, fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating,
- Insomnia, or oversleeping
- Appetite and/or weight loss or overeating and weight gain
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Restlessness, irritability

Depression among Mothers of Young Children Reported for Maltreatment

- Overwhelmed by the daily care of their young child
- Less vocal, respond more slowly to young children’s cues
- Have a blunt affect, are less positive and more distant
- Relatively inactive, display more hostility and irritability, and become frustrated more easily
- Show lower self-regulation and poorer judgment

Paper Co-Authors and NSCAW support

- Cecilia Casanueva, Ph.D., RTI International
- Theodore Cross, Ph.D., University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign
- Sharon Christ, Ph.D., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- NSCAW: Administration of Children and Families (ACF)
Impact of Maternal Depression on Early Child Development

• Compared to the children of non-depressed mothers, young children of depressed mothers tend to cry more and tend to be more drowsy, fussy less sociable and more insecurely attached.
• As children of mothers with depression reach school age, they also tend to have poorer mental, motor, and language skills development and more behavioral difficulties.

Service and Policy Context

• The “Keeping Children Safe Act” of 2003 (amended CAPTA) requires states to develop “provisions and procedures” to refer child maltreatment victims and their families to early intervention services.
• Family-centered needs assessment and truly comprehensive services require that the child welfare system consider (and address) caregiver needs (including mental health) to prevent further maltreatment and reduce out-of-home placements.

Depression among Mothers of Young Children Reported for Maltreatment

• No published estimates of the 12-month prevalence of maternal depression among young children reported for maltreatment.
• No reports of individual changes in depression trajectories.
• No analysis of predictors of depression, particularly as associated with parenting young children within the context of maltreatment.

This Study: Research Questions

• What percentage of the caregivers of young children involved with CWS suffer from depression?
• How persistent is depression across time in the population?
• What family and environmental characteristics predict a caregiver’s having depression at the time of contact with CWS (baseline) and afterward?
• What family and environmental characteristics predict individual changes in depression over time?

What is NSCAW?

A national, longitudinal study of children and families who have had contact with child welfare system for maltreatment reports:
- Data collection from children, current caregivers, caseworkers, teachers, and agency administrative records.
- Designed to address crucial program, policy, and practice issues of concern to the federal, state, and local governments, and child welfare agencies.

Study Overview

• Mandated by Congress in 1996.
• Study began in 1999.
• 6,200 children aged birth to 14 at the time of sampling.
• Five waves of data collection completed in 2007.
• First national study of child welfare to collect data from children and families.
NSCAW Data Sources

- Children
  - Assessments (young children)
  - Interviews (older children)
- Current Caregivers, Caseworkers, Local Agency Directors
  - Interviews
- Teachers
  - Survey completed via mail or on web

Current Study Sample, Instruments, Analysis

- Sample: Female caregivers of 1,244 young children (< 5 years) who were living at home at baseline and all follow-up periods and who completed at least one assessment for depression
- Measures: Screening scale of the World Health Organization Composite International Diagnostic Interview Short Form (CIDI-SF) and the Conflicts Tactics Scale (IPV)
- Groups: No depression, depression at only one point, depression at 2 points, depression at 3 or more points in time.

Analysis

- Prevalence estimates at each wave
- Chi-square tests to examine the association of depression with other factors
- Multiple logistic regression to predict four outcomes (e.g., three or more waves of depression)
- Growth curve analysis (unconditional population average trajectory model, models with one covariate, models with covariates) to examine the change in the odds of depression over time

Study Sample Characteristics

- Most of the caregivers were biological mothers (95.5%)
- 77.2% of caregivers were 15 to 29 years old, and 22.8% were 30 years or older
- One half were White, 23.2% African American, 15.5% Hispanic, and 10.5% of another race/ethnicity
- More than half of the caregivers (55.9%) were living at or below the federal poverty level
- 38% had been victims of interpersonal violence at the start of the study.

Rates of Maternal Depression by Wave

Symptoms among caregivers reporting feeling sad, blue or depressed

- 91.4% had felt more tired or low on energy
- 88.8% had lost interest in most hobbies, work, or activities that usually gave them pleasure
- 80.7% had experienced much more trouble concentrating than usual
- 74.3% had experienced more trouble falling asleep
- 71.6% had experienced feelings of low self-worth
- 54.3% had noted unexplained weight loss or weight gain
- 33.8% had thought repeatedly about death
Maternal Depression over Time

- 27.5% of caregivers had a score indicative of major depression at only one point
- Of those who had a score indicating major depression at baseline, 45.6% had a score at the 18-month follow-up, 39.4% at the 36-month follow-up, and 40.4% at the 5 to 6-year follow-up.
- Of those who were not depressed at baseline, 17.2% had a score at the 18-month follow-up, 16.1% at the 36-month follow-up, and 15.4% at the 5 to 6-year follow-up.

Multivariate Models: Correlates of Depression

- Intimate partner violence
- Fair or poor health
- Caregivers of children investigated for physical neglect (failure to provide)
- Non married caregivers
- Caregivers with a childhood history of abuse and neglect

Predictors of Multiple Episodes of Depression

- Caregivers who reported intimate partner violence (IPV) had 2X the odds of having 3 or more waves of depression than those who didn’t report IPV
- Caregivers in fair or poor health had more than 4X the odds of those in excellent, very good or good health for having two waves with depression

Discussion

- Depression is relatively prevalent (21.6% to 25.1% at any time in NSCAW) in this population
  - 6.7% of U.S. adults had a major depressive episode in the previous year (Kessler et al., 2005)
  - 16% of low-income women receiving welfare had depression (Rosen et al., 2006)
- 46.3% of these caregivers met criteria for major depression at some point in the study, almost 3 times that of national estimates of the adult lifetime prevalence of depression (16.6%) (Kessler et al., 2005)
Discussion

• Two risk factors were the most consistent correlates of a score in the clinical range for major depression: having been a victim of intimate partner violence and reporting fair or poor health.
• These have strong implications for early intervention services for maltreated young children and their families:
  – Importance of comprehensive assessments and multi-disciplinary approaches to intervention
  – Maltreatment risk, caregiver mental health and health, and family risk of exposure to violence.

From NSCAW I to NSCAW II

• New cohort: 5,900 children birth to 17 years.
• Baseline completed in August 2009.
• 18-month follow-up began in October 2009.
• Data release: SOON!