

History of Sexual Abuse vs. Other Traumas in Levels of Antenatal Depression

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Sexual Abuse (SA) has been found to cause a range of long-term physical and psychological problems in women, yet there seems to be a lack of data regarding the effects of SA history on pregnant women. This study examines the relationship between sexual abuse and depression during pregnancy and further compares levels of depression of women with sexual abuse histories to women who experienced other traumas (non-sexual).

A sample of 250 pregnant women ranging in age from 17-48 years ($M = 30$, $SD = 5$), were recruited in medical centers in the north of Israel. The questionnaire consisted of four scales: a demographic variables scale, the Sexual Experiences Survey Scale, the Traumatic Events Questionnaire, and the Beck Depression Inventory. Results indicated that women who experienced SA had higher levels of depression than women who experienced other traumas. However, when SA was differentiated into rape (penetration) and other sexual abuse subcategories (no penetration), women with sexual abuse histories (no penetration) were found to have similar depression levels as women who experienced other traumas. Those with a history of rape (penetration), however, were found to suffer higher levels of depression even relatively to those with other SA histories. Additionally, depression levels were found to negatively correlate with education levels and ethnicity was found to play a significant role as Israeli Arab pregnant women tended to obtain higher BDI scores than Israeli Jewish pregnant women.

The findings attest to the importance of screening women for depressive symptoms and their sexual abuse and trauma histories during pregnancy and providing adequate psychological support and treatment as needed. Further studies are needed in order to substantiate this study's findings.

Keywords: Sexual abuse, pregnancy, antenatal depression, ethnicity.

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