

PIRI

PARENT-INFANT
RESEARCH
INSTITUTE &
INFANT CLINIC



Focus on the Mother-Infant Relationship

Interactional and relational difficulties are commonly present in the context of postnatal depression (PND). Previous research suggests that in relating to their infant, some postnatally depressed women are less responsive, provide less stimulation, are less attuned, are less focussed on their baby and are less synchronised in affect and behaviour. These early relational interactions may have long-term consequences for the infant in terms of compromised cognitive,

behavioural and social development. Our research shows that mother-infant difficulties do not necessarily resolve with treatment for PND. Rather, the difficulties have been shown to persist even after the depression has been treated. Thus, the relational difficulties may become entrenched. Specialised mother-infant intervention is therefore recommended.

At PIRI we have developed and conducted specialised programs for parents and infants. Our HUGS programs (an acronym for Happiness, Understanding, Giving and Sharing) focuses on the mother-infant relationship and are conducted as groups or within an individual therapy program.

Of our three HUGS programs, BabyHUGS is the most well established, and was developed to be implemented following treatment for PND. Our second program is an expanded version of BabyHUGS, with a focus on running the program in the community, CommunityHUGS. Our third program, PremieHUGS, is designed for mothers and their premature infants. A mother-infant dance therapy program - Intuitive Mothering - is also well established and regularly offered.

We offer training to health professionals in some of our programs. For more information on any of our programs or to refer, contact the **Infant Clinic on 9496 4496.**

PIRI Newsletter
October-December 2007



The Parent Infant Research Institute (PIRI) is a vigorous and innovative Australian research institute focussing on understanding, developing and applying treatments to improve parent and infant well being. PIRI believes that early intervention is the key to better outcomes for families.

While PIRI has a strong research focus, it also comprises a clinical unit (Infant Clinic). The Infant Clinic is a Centre of Excellence and provides a clinical service to assist with the difficulties experienced by parents and infants in the first years of life.

PIRI/Infant Clinic Mother-Infant Programs

BabyHUGS

BabyHUGS focuses on assisting mothers to become more fully engaged and attuned to their infant following treatment of PND. BabyHUGS comprises three sessions, which include: play and physical contact to promote parent-infant engagement; a focus on observing and understanding infant cues; and, the examination of parental responses to infant cues. BabyHUGS has been previously researched and results demonstrated a rapid decline in parenting stress. For more information contact the intake worker on 9496 4496.



CommunityHUGS

BabyHUGS has been conducted by psychologists in a clinical setting. CommunityHUGS focuses on delivery of the program by Maternal Child Health Nurses in a community based setting. CommunityHUGS is a 10-session group program that incorporates multiple therapeutic approaches and paradigms, including BabyHUGS, cognitive behaviour therapy and the Intuitive Mothering program. To date, 14 mothers and babies have participated in CommunityHUGS, with 4 MCHNs receiving training to implement groups in their local community. Further groups are planned for 2008 and participants are needed. For more information contact Jennie Ericksen or Megan Andrew on 9496 4496.



PremieHUGS

A premature birth is often associated with multiple traumatic experiences for both mother and baby. Mothers may experience significant loss of control, grief/loss issues and may struggle to adjust, often contributing to depression, anxiety and trauma symptoms. Premature infants also endure multiple traumas of an emotional, social and medical nature, which may leave them vulnerable to developmental complications. PremieHUGS is an 8-week group program for mothers and their premature infants. The objective of the group is threefold: to provide maternal support, focus on the mother-infant relationship and potentially enhance early infant development.



Intuitive Mothering

This 8-week program has a focus on the natural movement, holding patterns and imaginative play that occurs between mother and infant. It incorporates movement and dance with music and is followed by a brief time for discussion with mothers about what they noticed in their baby's play. Intuitive Mothering builds on how each woman intuitively interacts with their infant and is facilitated by an experienced dance therapist. For more information contact Liz Loughlin on 9496 4496.



Perinatal Screening for Mood

Disturbance is Acceptable to Women

PIRI has recently published two research journal articles related to the acceptability of screening women for depression. Debate exists over whether screening for depression using the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS) should be part of routine perinatal care. Routine screening serves to increase identification of those at risk of depression and thereby increases the likelihood of treatment. While the EPDS is generally recognised as a valid, reliable, cost-effective and simple tool to implement into routine care, there has been little evidence regarding the level of acceptability of screening for depression to women.

Of the two articles published, one focussed on an antenatal population and the second on a postnatal population. Antenatally, we examined women's perceptions of acceptability of (1) completing a battery of questionnaires, including the EPDS, and (2) receiving feedback from midwives. We telephone interviewed 407 women screened at two antenatal hospital clinics. Results revealed women did not report feeling stigmatised, labelled or distressed by the screening process. The vast majority of women reported questionnaires and feedback from midwives reassuring. 100% of women said the screening experience was acceptable and not upsetting. Almost 50% reported that the screening process raised their awareness of perinatal depression.

In our postnatal sample, we aimed to measure acceptability in a survey of a relatively large, community sample with a high representation of clinically depressed women. Using mail, telephone and face-to-face interview, 920 postnatal women were approached to take part in a survey on the acceptability of the EPDS, including 601 women who had screened positive for depression and 245 who had received DSM-IV diagnoses of depression. Acceptability was measured on a 5-point Likert scale of comfort ranging from "Not Comfortable", through "Comfortable" to "Very Comfortable". The response rate was just over half (52%) with 479 respondents. Of these, 81.2% indicated that screening with the EPDS had been in the range of "Comfortable" to "Very Comfortable". The other 18.8 % rated screening below the "Comfortable" point, including a small fraction (4.3%) who rated answering questions on the EPDS as "Not Comfortable". Almost all respondents (97%) felt that screening was desirable.

Both studies had good acceptability for the EPDS for depressed and non-depressed women and strongly supports the acceptability of routine screening for risk factors of perinatal depression.

References:

Gemmill, A., Leigh, B., Ericksen, J. & Milgrom, J. (2006). A Survey of the Clinical Acceptability of Screening for Postnatal Depression in Depressed and Non-Depressed Women. **BMC Public Health**, **6**, 211.

Leigh, B. & Milgrom, J. (2007). Acceptability of Antenatal Screening in Routine Antenatal Care. **Australian Journal of Advanced Nursing**, **24** (3), 14-18.

Refer to our website for more details on these and other recently published articles: www.piri.org.au

AAIMH & APIMH

Joint National

Conference

The Australian Association for Infant Mental Health and Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Perinatal & Infant Mental Health conjointly presented the conference entitled: 'When Minds Meet: Pausing, Connecting, Relating'.

Held in Sydney, 31 Oct - 3 November 2007, the conference was highlighted by 4 distinguished international guests - 2 from the USA and 2 from Germany. The focus of the conference was firmly on infant mental health and ways we can support this through an understanding of the infant, working with the parent-infant relationship and adopting attachment-based approaches. Staff from PIRI presented on our three HUGS programs: BabyHUGS, CommunityHUGS and PremieHUGS.

PANDA Workshop

PANDA and Playgroup Victoria conjointly presented the 'Postnatal Depression: Recovery Through Connections Workshop'.

This one-day workshop was held in Melbourne on 23 November 2007. The day was well attended and spanned various topics such as infant brain development in the context of maternal depression and using music to enhance engagement. Staff from PIRI presented on support groups available in the City of Darebin, the BabyHUGS program and Intuitive Mothering.

The focus was on supporting recovery from PND through creating and maintaining connections - in the community, with family and friendship groups and with your baby. The day also marked the official launch of PANDA's publication 'A Guide to Postnatal Depression Support Groups'. For more information, contact PANDA: 9481 6210, www.panda.org.au

News News News...

Baby Business is Men's Business

A one-day focus on fathers and babies will be convened by the Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle, NSW on 17 April 2008. Currently, there is a call for papers on the topics of: 1. Researching



fathers and babies, or 2. Provision of services to fathers in the perinatal period. Posters and workshops on programs for fathers are also being sought. The

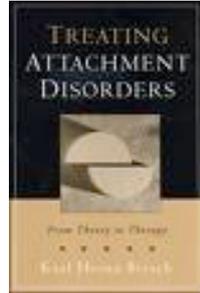
'Baby Business is Men's Business' one-day focus is part of a larger Family and Community Strengths Conference from 14-18 April 2008. For more information contact www.pco.com.au/family

PoNDER

The Ponder Postnatal Depression Support Group meets every Friday and offers women the opportunity to be supported in their journey through PND by connecting with other mums also struggling. Ponder is run by Darebin Family Services at Thornbury Women's Neighbourhood House. For more information phone 9481 9507.

Treating Attachment Disorders

'Treating Attachment Disorders: From Theory to Therapy' is the latest publication from Karl Heinz Brisch, an international key note speaker at the recent AAIMH Conference in Sydney. It presents a clearly expressed review and update of the basic concepts of attachment theory as developed by



John Bowlby, Mary Ainsworth, and current contributors. The fundamental evolutionary assumptions of the survival value of attachment behaviour are followed through the experiential vicissitudes of parent-child interaction, yielding a system with measures of sensitivity, quality (defined by a constructed "strange situation"), internal representations (working model), and the emergence of exploration and autonomy. There are clear parallels to individuation, dependency, attunement, object constancy as developed in psychoanalytic theory, and infant observations, which are placed in perspective and contrasted with attachment theory. It is richly illustrated with clinical material and is invaluable for those working in the perinatal period with parents and infants.

Bonnie Babes Foundation

The Bonnie Babes Foundation is a non government funded, non-profit, volunteer based charity which provides:

- 24 hour, 7 day per week counselling for families that have experienced the loss of a baby through miscarriage, stillbirth or prematurity and related issues such as infertility
- Medical equipment to hospitals for premature babies
- Vital medical research into pregnancy loss and complications after birth
- Education and training for health professionals and volunteers

For more information contact www.bbf.org.au



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