

Symposium | Psychiatric Diagnosis : [Symposium 115] Clinical Diagnosis is critical to advancing the improvement in clinical care and outcomes through research in mental health

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[Symposium 115] Clinical Diagnosis is critical to advancing the improvement in clinical care and outcomes through research in mental health

Moderator: Megan Galbally (Monash University)

[SY-115-02] Assessing depression in fatherhood research: Challenges and complexities in diagnostic and symptom measurement

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There is a growing body of research examining fathers' mental health and its impact on child development and family wellbeing. Depression has been of particular interest because of its high prevalence and potential impact on parenting experience and behaviour. Yet most of the screening tools and diagnostic frameworks for depression do not account for gender differences in symptom expression. This may have contributed to the under-recognition and under-diagnosis of depression in men.

This issue is especially relevant in perinatal mental health research, where studies of fathers rarely use diagnostic measures and typically rely on screening tools developed for mothers, such as the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS). Previous research has demonstrated that the EPDS has a different factor structure for fathers, and a lower positive predictive value for depression in fathers compared to mothers.

The transition to fatherhood represents a unique context for the onset of depression in men, associated with a unique combination of biological, psychological and social stressors. Yet few measures of depression have been validated in perinatal men, and most fail to capture the externalising symptoms more commonly reported by depressed men, such as irritability, substance use, risk taking, and poor impulse control.

Further conceptual and empirical work is required to enhance our understanding of depression in fathers and improve the methodological rigor of perinatal mental health research.