



REVIEW ARTICLE

Paternal depression in Pakistan: An overlooked concern.

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ABSTRACT... Paternal depression, though gaining global attention, remains a largely overlooked issue in Pakistan, where cultural norms and societal expectations often discourage fathers from expressing emotional vulnerability. This commentary examines the prevalence, risk factors, and consequences of paternal depression in Pakistan, drawing comparisons with international studies. Emerging evidence suggests that paternal depression in Pakistan may be more prevalent than previously thought, with similar rates found in other low and middle-income countries. Key risk factors identified include financial stress, relationship difficulties, and lack of social support, all of which are particularly pronounced in Pakistan's socio-economic and cultural context. The impact of paternal depression extends beyond the father, influencing family dynamics, child development, and maternal mental health. Children of depressed fathers are more likely to experience behavioral and emotional challenges, while the mother's mental health may also deteriorate due to the added burden. This paper advocates for increased awareness, culturally sensitive interventions, and the integration of mental health screenings for fathers within maternal and child health services. Addressing paternal depression is crucial for improving family well-being, child development, and long-term public health outcomes in Pakistan.

Key words: Paternal Depression, Depression in Fathers.

INTRODUCTION

Depression in fathers, often overshadowed by maternal depression, has gained increased recognition globally but remains an under-researched topic, especially in developing countries like Pakistan. Paternal depression refers to depressive symptoms experienced by fathers, particularly during the perinatal period. The global understanding of paternal mental health has expanded significantly, with growing awareness of its prevalence, risk factors, and impact on both the father and the family. However, in Pakistan, little attention has been paid to this issue despite its significant consequences. This commentary aims to highlight the prevalence, causes, and implications of paternal depression in Pakistan while drawing comparisons with international studies.

Prevalence of Paternal Depression

Research on paternal depression in Pakistan is limited, though emerging evidence suggests it

may be more prevalent than commonly thought. A study from South Asia estimated the prevalence of paternal depression to be around 10% during the perinatal period, similar to findings from other low and middle-income countries (LMICs).¹ In high-income countries, such as the United States and Australia, the prevalence of paternal depression ranges from 5% to 10%.² These numbers highlight that paternal mental health issues are not confined to a specific region or income group but are a global concern.

The lack of comprehensive studies on paternal depression in Pakistan may be due to cultural norms that discourage men from expressing vulnerability or seeking help for emotional struggles.³ In Pakistani society, fathers are often seen as the primary breadwinners, expected to provide for their families while maintaining emotional stoicism. This cultural expectation can exacerbate mental health issues, as fathers may suppress their symptoms, fearing social stigma

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or judgment.

Risk Factors for Paternal Depression

Numerous risk factors contribute to paternal depression, many of which overlap with maternal depression. However, fathers face unique challenges that can contribute to their mental health struggles. International studies have identified financial stress, relationship issues, and a lack of social support as significant risk factors for paternal depression.⁴ In Pakistan, economic pressures are particularly pronounced, as fathers are often the sole financial providers for extended families. A recent survey in Pakistan found that fathers experiencing financial difficulties were at a higher risk of developing depressive symptoms, particularly during the postpartum period.⁵

In addition to financial stress, the quality of the marital relationship plays a crucial role in paternal mental health. Research from the United Kingdom indicates that poor spousal relationships and a lack of communication can exacerbate depressive symptoms in fathers.⁶ This finding is relevant to Pakistan, where arranged marriages and traditional gender roles may limit open communication between partners, potentially worsening paternal mental health.⁷

Sleep disturbances and role strain also contribute to paternal depression. Fathers, especially new ones, often experience sleep disruptions due to the demands of caring for a newborn. A study from Sweden found that disrupted sleep and the pressures of balancing work and family life significantly increased the risk of depression in fathers.⁸ This challenge is magnified in Pakistan, where fathers are expected to maintain full-time employment while providing additional emotional and financial support to their families.⁹

Impact of Paternal Depression

The consequences of paternal depression extend beyond the individual father, affecting the family unit as a whole. International research shows that children of fathers with depression are more likely to experience behavioral, emotional, and cognitive difficulties.¹⁰ In Pakistan, where extended family structures are common, the

ripple effect of paternal depression can impact not only the nuclear family but also the broader social network, potentially leading to strained family relationships and impaired child development.

Depressed fathers may also struggle to form strong emotional bonds with their children, a factor crucial for healthy child development. A study from Australia found that fathers with depression were less likely to engage in positive parenting behaviors, such as playing with their children or providing emotional support. This is particularly concerning in Pakistan, where traditional parenting roles often position fathers as disciplinarians rather than nurturers, further limiting the father-child emotional connection.

Moreover, paternal depression can negatively affect the mental health of the mother. A study from the United States highlighted that maternal depression rates are higher when fathers are also depressed, leading to a cyclical pattern of mental health struggles within the family. In Pakistan, where mental health services are limited and societal stigma remains high, the dual burden of parental depression can place immense strain on the family unit, leading to long-term consequences for both parents and children.

Addressing Paternal Depression: The Way Forward

Given the growing recognition of paternal depression worldwide, there is an urgent need for Pakistan to address this overlooked issue. Raising awareness about paternal mental health is the first step. Public health campaigns aimed at reducing stigma and encouraging men to seek help can play a pivotal role in addressing the issue. In Australia, national campaigns focused on paternal mental health have successfully increased public awareness and reduced stigma associated with depression in fathers. Similar initiatives could be implemented in Pakistan, where public discussions about mental health are still limited.

Additionally, integrating mental health screening for fathers into routine maternal and child health services could help identify those at risk. In the

United Kingdom, mental health screenings for fathers have been included in postnatal checkups, leading to earlier identification and intervention for paternal depression. In Pakistan, healthcare providers, particularly those involved in maternal and child health, should be trained to recognize the signs of paternal depression and provide appropriate referrals for treatment.

Culturally sensitive interventions are essential in addressing paternal depression in Pakistan. Programs that involve community leaders and religious figures could help shift cultural perceptions of mental health and encourage fathers to seek help without fear of judgment. A study from South Asia suggested that community-based mental health programs can effectively reduce stigma and improve access to care in culturally conservative societies. These interventions could be tailored to Pakistan's unique cultural and religious context to maximize their impact.

CONCLUSION

Paternal depression remains an underexplored issue in Pakistan, despite its significant impact on families and child development. International studies have shown that paternal mental health is a critical component of overall family well-being, and Pakistan cannot afford to overlook this concern. By raising awareness, reducing stigma, and integrating mental health services for fathers into existing healthcare systems, Pakistan can take important steps toward improving paternal mental health outcomes. It is crucial for researchers, policymakers, and healthcare providers to prioritize paternal mental health and address this growing public health concern.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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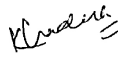
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AUTHORSHIP AND CONTRIBUTION DECLARATION

No.	Author(s) Full Name	Contribution to the paper	Author(s) Signature
1	Khadeeja Ishtiaq	Main concept and literature review of previous articles on this topic, proofreading, editing.	
2	Iqra Shakoor	Review of all the factors contributing to and aggravating the illness and shedding light on what can be done in the future, discussion and conclusion.	