Suffering In Silence: How Postpartum Depression Develops

People say a baby is always a blessing but getting pregnant and carrying a child for nine months is not a walk in the park. There are many changes that can happen to a woman physically and emotionally. Some may easily accept and embrace it, some may don't. While most of the new mothers are excited about it, there are still ones who are not and the others may feel both which leads to the question why.

After giving birth, a usual situation is being experienced by new mothers. Women would experience fluctuation of emotions and mood swings. They would feel happy then suddenly would feel sad. For a moment they would feel really excited then after a few minutes they will cry. Others experience losing their appetite, finding it hard to sleep, being oversensitive, feeling anxious and having poor concentration. This is commonly known as "baby blues". It is normal for new mothers to have baby blues and it typically occurs in the early postpartum period within three to ten days after delivery. However, if these symptoms last beyond two weeks and seem to get worse, the mother may be experiencing postpartum depression and should seek professional medical help.

Postpartum depression or PPD is a major depressive episode associated with childbirth (MacQueen & Chokka, 2004). This is because of the major drop of estrogen and progesterone which creates a chemical change in the brain that leads to mood swings. Unlike the baby blues, a mother with postpartum depression feels worse over time and changes in her behavior does not go away on their own even with the help of their loved ones.

Postpartum major mood disorder depression, or postpartum depression (PPD), affects from 10% to 16% of postpartal women (Ugarizza & Robinson, 1997; Beck, 2002). This statistics simply implies the importance of giving additional medical assistance to new mothers especially first time moms. But because of the fact that not all women are diagnosed, the actual number may be even larger. But how can someone tell that a woman is suffering from PPD? The signs are almost the same as baby blues but it is more severe and serious. New mothers report an increased yearning for sleep, sleeping heavily, but awakening instantly with any infant noise and an inability to go back to sleep after infant feedings. One mother described the onset as related to an inability to breastfeed, no let down. (Reynolds, 2004).

Breastfeeding plays an important role in PPD. A mothering hormone called Ocytocin are released from the brain while breastfeeding which increases relaxation and concentration. It can also lower stress and anxiety. Another feature of postpartum depression is infant rejection. There are mothers who would feel jealous with the presence of the baby thinking that the baby will take her place in her partner's affection and family's attention. The mother may show disinterest and irritation. This attitude is rarely being addressed because of embarrassment in the woman's part and as a result, it can cause violent outburst and may lead to hurting the child or anyone in the family. Although women with postpartum depression have no ideation of hurting their infants, but because of the feeling of abandonment, this may result to a trust issue with the mother and this is according to Erikson's stages of psychosocial development. Some women would not want to talk about it because they will feel that people will think of them as delusional. They feel scared that family members may take the child away from them.

Other predictors of postpartum depression include prenatal depression, life stress, lack of social support, marital dissatisfaction and unplanned or unwanted pregnancy. It is indeed a struggle to fight PPD for women with these problems. Personal matters such as money or work may be associated to life stress. Having no support from parents and friends and poor relationship with partner may also trigger depression. It is important for new mothers to feel that they are loved and cared about in raising a child. New mothers will feel overwhelmed with the situation of having their first born and they would normally feel restless. As simple as helping them with taking care of the baby so she could get some rest may decrease the risk of having a postpartum depression. PPD may also affect the entire family because it can lead to having an unhealthy relationship with each other. It is inevitable that sometimes, people tend to focus too much on the baby and forget about the condition of the mother. Unwanted pregnancy is very common in young women. Consequently, they suffer depression because of the fact that they are not ready and find it hard to accept the baby. Problem with mental health including postpartum depression is slowly becoming an issue not only here in the Philippines but also in other countries and should be addressed and taken seriously. It is a sad truth that not everyone can get treatment because of many factors. I believe that early diagnosis is the key in decreasing the risk of having a PPD. But because majority of women who develop postpartum depression have no identified risk factors, all women that have given birth should be screened for signs and symptoms of depression. Educating new mothers regarding baby blues is also ideal in preparing them in entering the world of motherhood so they would know what and what not to expect. Alternative therapies such as herbs, dietary supplements, massage, aromatherapy and acupuncture may be helpful. (Weier & Beal, 2004).

Allow me to share my personal thoughts and experiences about this matter. I have given birth to a healthy, bouncy baby girl at the age of 24. I have to admit that it was unplanned but like what I have written, a baby is always a blessing. The first time that I saw my baby, I was on cloud nine. I was excited to touch and kiss her. The excitement was there despite of the pain and struggle. Being a first time mom, I did not know what to expect. I had no idea what baby blues was until it hit me after a week. I had days full of crying, laughing and fighting with the people surrounding me and it lasted for months. I experienced being agitated to everyone especially to the father of my child. We fought countless times because of petty reasons. I had a drastic weight loss. I remember feeling so sad because I felt that my life is over because of the baby. I even thought of giving away my baby. And the scariest part is, for once I wanted her to disappear. I never asked for help, nor tell anyone what I was feeling because of fear that they might think that I was going crazy. It is hard for me to tell if it was postpartum depression because I did not get medical help but because of my sister who is also a mother of two, she knew what I was experiencing. She educated the people around me of what I was going through. Because of my support group, I was able to surpass it. They pushed me to breastfeed and I guess it was a big help for me to develop a good relationship with my baby. I went on with my life not noticing that I was already back in my normal mental state. This goes to show that support system is really the key in whatever crisis that a person may face, and that includes women with postpartum depression who are suffering in silence.

“Any woman can be a mother, but it takes someone special to be called a mom” – anonymous.