



# Windows of intervention opportunity for working with couples in the antenatal and early postpartum period

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# Introduction

- Importance of positive parenting for violence prevention over a lifespan
- Engaging couples is key to gender transformative early parenting interventions
- Relationship quality and functioning is a critical concept
- Greater understanding of the relationship and dyadic factors underlying behaviour and unique relationship permutations arising out of differing social contexts



# Study Aims

- To assess prevalence of postpartum depression amongst women up to 6 weeks postpartum;
- To explore individual, interpersonal, and structural correlates of postpartum depression;
- To explore women's experiences of being parented and how this impacted on their understanding of motherhood.

# Study Design

## Quantitative Component:

- 275 biological mothers  $\geq 18$  years old with infants  $\leq 6$  weeks of age were recruited from an urban public antenatal clinic in Durban

## Qualitative Component:

- 30 mothers (15 living with HIV, 14 living without HIV, 1 undisclosed) were randomly selected from quantitative study
- Interviews explored maternal experiences and understandings of motherhood as well as the potential influence of antecedent experiences on current understanding and parenting practices.



# Results

Participant Characteristics (N=30)	
Age (Years) (Median, Interquartile Range [IQR])	28.5, 24-33
Infant age (Weeks) (Median, IQR)	6.0, 1.3-6.0
Living with HIV	16 (53.3%)
Unplanned pregnancy	27 (90.0%)
Number of biological children (alive) (includes index infant)	
1	7 (23.3%)
2	8 (26.7%)
3	11 (36.7%)
4	4 (13.3%)
PHQ-9	
Minimal depression	15 (50.0%)
Mild depression	14 (46.7%)
Moderately severe to severe depression	1 (3.3%)
EPDS	
Positive screen	12 (40.0%)
Negative screen	18 (60.0%)

# Living arrangements

- Just under half of participants (47%) were not living with their partners and there was strong sentiment amongst participants that it was unacceptable to live with partners if unmarried.

*It is every woman's wish to get married. No woman wants to live with a man endlessly. (20 years old, HIV-positive)*

*... we have three different shacks, mine and my sister's on the same yard and my boyfriend's on another yard next door. He comes to eat and chat but we don't sleep together.*

*Interviewer: You don't want to share the same bed with him?*

*Participant: No at home they don't allow such a thing.*

*Interviewer: Do you plan to get married?*

*Participant: Yes he says when he gets enough money we will get married.*

*(28 years old, HIV-positive)*

# Patterns of male partner engagement in the antenatal period

- Male partner level of involvement in participant's lives differed between the antenatal and early postnatal period
- Pregnancy could catalyse support from male partners
- Descriptions of support were often material but could also be emotional.

*He would dab my feet and then rub them. After that he would cook. (32 years old, HIV-negative)*

*He was always by my side. He used to accompany me to the clinic. He would give me money to go to the doctor and if I needed money for any other thing he would give it to me. He was always available. (28 years old, HIV-negative)*

# Patterns of male partner engagement in the antenatal period

- Pregnancy also cause for breakdown in relationships

*He didn't show any emotion. I couldn't tell whether he was happy or disappointed. At that time our relationship was already shaky but we still continued with the relationship. After four months into my pregnancy, things fell apart. (33 years old, HIV-positive)*

*After I told him I was pregnant he disappeared. I haven't seen him since then. I know he is around in the community and I know where he lives. It is just that we don't see each other anymore....He just said he was not ready to have a second child because he has got another one that is still very small. (30 years old, HIV-negative)*



# Patterns of male partner engagement in the antenatal period

- Concurrent sexual relationships was a key factor in relationship breakdown and lack of male partner involvement in the antenatal period
- This dynamic fed into the unstable living arrangements

*...[the father of my child] is just lodging with me! ... if I no longer want him around I will kick him out. If he starts developing wings I will kick him out. I am sure he could also do the same if I were lodging with him. If he feels like bringing a new girlfriend, he can kick me out. So it is better that it is my house, being a woman. (33 years old, HIV status undisclosed)*

# Patterns of male partner engagement in the postnatal period

- Distinct shift in patterns of male partner support between the antenatal and postnatal period

# Patterns of male partner engagement in the postnatal period

- Continued support
- Increasing tension or breakdown in relationships
- Reduced couple contact/'distancing'

*... this child cries the whole night, we take turns to hold him and make him calm down. We don't sleep at night. My partner would ask me to sleep for a while and he would take the child calm him down. We do that until the next morning. He even feeds him the bottle. (44 years old, HIV-positive)*

*Interviewer: Now I would like you to tell me if he has ever talked to you about his dreams in terms of your future with him and your children's?*

*Participant: We have never talked about that. Of late there is nothing much we talk about. (26 years old, HIV-negative)*

# Factors shaping father engagement in early postnatal period

- Distance due to traditional taboos around childbirth:
  - Partners not permitted access to maternal household
  - Expectations around a period of parental abstinence after birth

*...he doesn't come to my home. He stands outside and I take the child to him. (21 years old, HIV-negative)*

*As we have a small baby we don't have sex. We last had sex a week before I had the baby. (30 years old, HIV-positive)*

.....

*Interviewer: How long do you have to wait [to resume sexual relations]?  
Participant: Three to six months... It is meant to allow the child to grow. The mother is responsible to allow the child to grow. (20 years old, HIV-positive)*

# Shifting patterns of male partner support

- Reflected in shift in male partner material support from the new mother to the child.
- Expectations that family members provide financially for the new mother

*Participant: My boyfriend helps me. He comes in the afternoon to do washing for the child and hangs it before he goes to work.*

*Interviewer: Does he give you money to support the child?*

*Participant: He does though at times he complains that he can't support me and the child and his family all at once. He says he can only support his child and I must ask my family to support me. (24 years old, HIV-negative)*

*Participant: He also gives me money for the child once a month.*

*Interviewer: What about you?*

*Participant: It's my mother that gives me money for my needs.*

*Interviewer: What about food?*

*Participant: Right now as I am still living with my sister, she provides me with food. (28 years old, HIV-negative)*

# Expectations of male partner support

- Women's conceptualization of male partner's support in the postnatal period revolved primarily around material support of the child

*I think the mother is an important figure because she is always with the child. The father is far from the child.*

*Interviewer: So what is the responsibility of a father?*

*Participant: He must provide money only. (33 years old, HIV-positive)*

*Interviewer: So you haven't been to see [your partner] since the baby was born?*

*Participant: No*

*Interviewer: Why?*

*Participant: It is not time yet for him to see the child.*

*Interviewer: So how long does it have to be for him to be able to see the child?*

*Participant: I don't know but I also don't want to see him now. I only meet him when he has to give me something for the child only. (26 years old, HIV-negative)*

# Factors shaping paternal engagement in early postnatal period

*What use am I to him because I have a small baby! (33 years old, HIV status undisclosed)*

I think having a child has made things worse...He loves his child but at times I get the feeling that I am delaying his plans and also that I am unemployed. I feel like I am useless. (23 years old, HIV-positive)

[T]he problem came when he had to pay the crèche and the car that took the child to the crèche. He then disappeared.... He said he was going to be a good parent and support the child. He only did that for a couple of months and disappeared again when my child asked for school fees. (32 years old, HIV-positive)

# Conclusions and recommendations

- Different patterns of support between antenatal and postnatal periods
- Antenatal period may provide a window to work with couples, when male partners provide emotional and material support and there is a sense of joint venture.
- Utilising this collaborative moment may provide a way into engaging women and men in interventions to strengthen gender equality and respectful relationships to reduce IPV.
- Caveat: Antenatal period also a melting pot of other key priorities. Watch this space.



# Partners

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