Software prevents depression during and after pregnancy, study finds

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TechAndComputer (Nov. 12, 2012) Despite 6 to 8% of women in Spain suffering depression during and after pregnancy, there are few effective tools for early detection and treatment. Researchers at the Universitat Jaume I of Castellón and the University of Zaragoza, in collaboration with professionals from different health centres in Spain, are working on developing a psychological on-line assessment tool to detect and prevent emotional disturbances during pregnancy and after childbirth. It is a tool that through Internet will assess, diagnose and, in the future, intervene, in cases of prenatal and postnatal depression.

Early detection of the likelihood of developing these emotional changes could reduce both the impact of mental illness in the mother and a negative impact on physical and emotional development of the fetus and also reduce healthcare costs. The tool also aims to provide the most appropriate professional assistance for pregnant women comfortably, quickly and easily through the Internet. The project's main researcher, Jorge Osma, explains that the tool can be applied in both public and private centres and is a pioneering experience in Spain.

The application, called *"MamáFeliz" Happy mother,* is currently at the field study phase with a hundred pregnant women in the Valencian region and Aragón testing it. New participants will be incorporated through the collaboration of centres of Castilla y León, Madrid, Cataluña and Andalucía. The computer application ([www .mamafeliz.es](http://www.mamafeliz.es)) allows measuring risk factors of emotional disorders. Besides psychological aspects, MamáFeliz also tracks information of sociodemographic, clinical and obstetric relevance, and offers the participant the results that show her emotional state. "So far all the variables that predispose a woman to depression during or after pregnancy had not been combined" says Osma.

The first results of the research show 48% of women had had previous depressions, which increases the risk of relapse, and 20% began to have symptoms of depression during pregnancy." Another significant risk factor present in 48% of the cases is, according Osma, feelings of ambivalence. "Sometimes they experience positive emotions related to pregnancy and childbirth, and other times, negative thoughts like fear, anxiety or doubt." The most frequent stressful life events are changes in economic conditions and changes in sleep habits, followed by changes in living or working conditions.

Other psychosocial variables that appear as risk factors in the scientific literature on the subject are the presence of psychopathologies in the mother or family, sociodemographic or obstetric

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variables, lack of social support, lack of partner or couple problems, increased life stress, substance abuse, past abortions, unintended pregnancies, anxiety towards the fetus, low self-esteem, low income, medical/physical problems during pregnancy and low capacity to cope with changes, among others.

In a new phase, the tool will also provide prevention and intervention applications. Cybertherapy or on-line therapy is emerging as a complement and an alternative to traditional counselling. "The British health system, for example, already integrates applications and on-line therapy for the treatment of depression," explains Osma.

Pregnant women interested in taking part in the study may do so through collaborating health centres in Castellón or contacting the team directly through the web www.mamafeliz.es . After receiving an access code, they may complete the questionnaires. Participants will know their emotional state and automatically enter a draw for different gifts.

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