



PERINATAL SUPPORT WASHINGTON

WHAT IS POSTPARTUM OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE DISORDER?

The National Institute of Mental Health estimates that about 3% of the general population suffer from obsessive-compulsive disorder, an anxiety disorder notable for uncontrollable thoughts or fears and repetitive behaviors. A study done by researchers at Northwestern University in 2013 found that 11% of a group of 461 new mothers screened positive for OCD symptoms two weeks after the birth of their child. At six months postpartum, nearly 50% of those women had persistent symptoms, and an additional 5.4% had developed new OCD symptoms. The study also found that attendant positive screens for depression and anxiety were predictors for the development of OCD symptoms.

In contrast to OCD in the general population, postpartum OCD comes on rapidly. Researchers have found that postpartum obsessions often center on horrifying and intrusive thoughts related to harm befalling the baby, or the mother harming her baby intentionally. Compulsive rituals may center on constantly checking on a sleeping baby, fear of germs, and maternal avoidance to ensure the baby's safety.

Miller, E. S. , Chu, C., Gollan, J., & Gossett, D. (April 2013) Obsessive-compulsive symptoms during the postpartum period: A prospective cohort. *The Journal of Reproductive Medicine*, 58. Retrieved from http://www.reproductivemedicine.com/toc/auto_abstract.php?id=24053.