

Postpartum depression can impact fathers, partners, too

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Breaking the silence: Seeking to erase the stigma around postpartum depression

When Mike Shadday learned he and his wife were having twins, he was thrilled. But caring for two newborns brought stressful moments.

“We were excited about starting a family, and now we’re going to double the family in size, right off the jump,” the 33-year-old Holliston resident said, recalling the ultrasound appointment where they received the news. “We had this kind of preconceived notion of what parenting was going to look like, and obviously we were wrong about everything ... and once they both got here, it was beautiful and stressful all at the same time.”

His fraternal-twin daughters are now 13 months old.

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Though postpartum depression is primarily associated with and experienced by mothers, it can also affect fathers and partners. While 1 in 5 new mothers experience symptoms of PMADs — perinatal mood and anxiety disorders — 1 in 10 new partners are diagnosed.

But this number only reflects those who report symptoms, meaning it is likely much higher, said Sarah Baroud, a licensed Massachusetts therapist specializing in perinatal mood and anxiety disorders.

For fathers and partners, symptoms of PMADs often stem from their partners experiencing them, Baroud said.

“There is already a stigma around mental health that exists for everybody still unfortunately, and even more so for men,” she said. “We know that services and supports are getting a lot better for moms, but we still have a long way to go for dads and partners.”

Shadday said one of the biggest stressors for him in new parenthood was balancing work and family obligations.

New partners often find themselves in a difficult position, stuck between a responsibility to care for their significant other and newborns and the pressure to return to the office to keep their growing family financially afloat.

At a time when mental health struggles, including those of men, already often go overlooked, a lack of workplace accommodation for new fathers and partners can exacerbate this.

In the U.S., paid parental leave is not required by federal law. But under the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993, employers are required to offer a minimum of 12 unpaid weeks for new parents if it is a company with 50

or more employees.

While Massachusetts offers up to 12 weeks of paid bonding leave for either parent in addition to workplace parental leave, little data is reported about how much leave fathers and partners actually take in Massachusetts. In 2025, Massachusetts had 45,097 approved child-bonding leave applications, but data did not specify what percentage of this was for fathers and partners.

But Baroud said oftentimes taking more than a few weeks is frowned upon for fathers and partners in corporate settings.



“The workplace culture still often does not always support or make it normal or easy for dads to take more than a few days or maybe two weeks, and then they’re kind of expected to be right back in it,” she said.

“They’re feeling pressure to financially provide for the family and be the person that returns to work sooner so that benefits and money all keeps going, and simultaneously feeling guilty about the lack of connection maybe they feel they’re not having with their new baby,” she said. “They’re maybe not showing up for their partner in the way they would really want to.”

The issue extends to same-sex couples and adoptive parents, as disparities often exist in the amount of leave offered to birthing parents versus non-birthing parents, who are given limited accommodation to begin with, Baroud said.

Shadday said his job offered four weeks of paid paternity leave, which he took but staggered.

“Every second I was at work I hated the fact that I was there, and I was like I need to be home helping because what we’re doing at home feels impossible,” he said. “And then when I was home and I’m looking at the Target delivery order that we have together for formula, diapers, and wipes, it’s like, oh gosh, we need to make sure that we can keep doing this for two babies instead of one.”

Baroud said while, systemically, there are still major barriers to overcome, parents can ease some of the burden by making small changes at home.

Date nights, she said, might not be on people’s radars, and sometimes dinner might feel too difficult to coordinate in the early stages of parenthood. But grabbing a coffee or quick lunch together while a family member watches the baby can still offer a moment of connection that feels more doable.

Shadday said his advice to new parents is to prioritize sleep and communication as much as possible, even if it means taking turns sleeping and switching halfway through the night to watch a monitor.

“Things got way more difficult when we were having to do them when we were exhausted,” he said. “Finding a rhythm and a routine that allowed us both to sleep was great.”

Baroud emphasized that mental health for both parents can be considered without one taking away from the other.

“We don’t always make space for that, or we feel like, how could the father possibly have anything to complain about, they’re not the one that just birthed the baby. But then we’re really not doing justice to their experience ... it is really doing a disservice to the whole family system,” she said.

“It can be, let’s support mom and make space for dad and acknowledge that this is a huge transition for him, too.”



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