

Duxbury deaths put a spotlight on postpartum mood disorders. Here's how to recognize them and where to get help.

By [Zeina Mohammed](#) Globe Staff, Updated January 27, 2023, 10:02 a.m.



Over three million women give birth in the United States every year. Nearly a fifth of them will experience postpartum depression or other pregnancy-related mood disorders. NATALIE KEYSSAR/THE NEW YORK TIMES

A [Duxbury mother charged with killing two of her children](#) had previously posted on her Facebook page about struggling with postpartum anxiety. Her third child died Friday. The tragic case has put a spotlight on a mental health issue affecting many new mothers.

Over three million women give birth in the United States every year. Nearly a fifth of them will experience [postpartum depression](#) or other pregnancy-related mood disorders.

But, for many, getting the help they need isn't so simple.

“Some people don't know how to identify it within themselves,” said Jessie Colbert, executive director of the Mass. PPD Fund, a nonprofit focused on postpartum depression awareness and advocacy in Massachusetts. “Some keep it to themselves, because there's a lot of stigma.”

Most new mothers will experience mood fluctuation in the first few weeks following birth, but if those start to interfere with their ability to care for themselves or their baby, it may be a warning sign of something more serious. Signs could include extreme hopelessness or guilt, loss of sleep or appetite, and feeling disconnected to the child, according to Colbert.

Women can experience a range of conditions during and after pregnancy, including postpartum depression, anxiety disorders, and, most rarely, postpartum psychosis.

ADVERTISING



Replay

The causes are biological, but also psychological and social, Colbert said. Those with histories of mental health issues, lack of social support, or traumatic experiences giving birth, for example, are at a higher risk for developing these conditions.

Women of color are also [more likely to experience postpartum depression](#) than white women and far less likely to receive appropriate care.

Luckily, an increasing number of resources are available to new parents in the state who may be or suspect they may be dealing with pregnancy-related mental health issues.

Talking to a trusted health care provider is always the best place to start, according to Rosha Forman, a certified nurse-midwife and Director of Midwifery Services at Boston Medical Center. Health care professionals can screen for depression and other conditions, provide referrals to more appropriate providers, and help monitor symptoms.

For parents who feel they are too busy to make appointments with their own doctors, pediatricians can be a great resource and are equipped to screen for postpartum depression. In fact, the American Academy of Pediatrics [recommends routine screening](#) for postpartum depression in mothers during the first 6 months of their children's lives, although less than 50 percent of mothers in the United States are actually screened.

“When I suffered from severe postpartum, it was my son's pediatrician that made me aware,” said Dr. Nicole Christian-Brathwaite, a child and adolescent psychiatrist and founder of Well Minds Psychiatry and Consulting in Boston. “I was so profoundly depressed, I was not able to fully notice.”

Hotlines are another option for overwhelmed parents. The [National Maternal Mental Health Hotline](#), a 24-hour free and confidential hotline for pregnant women and new moms, can be reached at 833-943-5746.

[Postpartum Support International](#), an organization dedicated to postpartum depression, anxiety, and distress, also operates a helpline that people can call or text “help” to at 800-944-4773. Spanish services are available at 971-203-7773.

Another helpful resource for all parents, not just those struggling with their mental health, are doulas. A [2022 report](#) from the Massachusetts Special Commission on Racial Inequities in Maternal Health, found a link between doula care and decreased rates of postpartum depression.

Postpartum doulas, specifically, are trained to provide emotional and physical support to families after the birth of a new baby. Their services range from teaching new parents how to care for and bond with the baby to taking on household responsibilities to allow new moms to rest.

“We can bring peace and order to the home and, if a mother needs help, we can identify it quicker,” said Ananda Lowe, director of the [Boston Doula Circle](#), an organization offering doula and lactation support services.

Although doula care, which Lowe said can range from \$30-\$60 an hour in Boston, is generally not covered by insurance, there are doulas that work pro bono or at discounted rates. The Boston Doula Circle, for example, offers a 75 percent discount for families who qualify for MassHealth.

Interested parents can search for doulas in their area using an [online database](#) that lets them narrow the search by race, language spoken, and whether the doula accepts Medicaid or other insurance.

Zeina Mohammed can be reached at zeina.mohammed@globe.com. Follow her on Twitter [@_ZeinaMohammed](https://twitter.com/_ZeinaMohammed).

©2023 Boston Globe Media Partners, LLC