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Supporting Fathers and Partners in the NICU

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Supporting Fathers and Partners in the NICU

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Risks for Paternal Psychological Distress

- Hormonal Factors
 - Testosterone, Estrogen, Oxytocin, Prolactin, Vasopressin, Cortisol
- Paternal role
- Psychological Contributions
 - Parental Couple Relationship
 - Avoidant Coping
 - Increased Responsibilities
 - COVID-19

Shaw et al., 2021

Paternal Depression

- 10% paternal depression
- 18% for HeadStart families
- Most common 3-6 mos after birth
- Symptoms: Irritability, Emotional detachment, Withdrawal, Increase substance use

Goodman, 2008; Harmon, 2010; Shaw et al., 2021

Paternal Anxiety

- Higher than depression
- Prenatal: 4.1%-16%
- Postnatal: 2.4%-18%

Shaw et al., 2021

Paternal Postpartum Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

- 33% for NICU fathers
- Severe symptoms endorsed at 6 months postdelivery
- Characterized by:
 - Hypervigilance
 - Intrusive thoughts
 - Increased irritability

Kim & Swain, 2007; Shaw et al., 2021

Screening

- Edinburgh
- 5/6 cutoff score for fathers
- 2, 4, 6 months well child checks
- Fathers Support Scale: NICU
 - 33 items
 - 3 sections
 - Learning about your baby
 - Taking care of yourself and your family
 - Taking care of your baby

Mahon et al, 2014

When working with fathers/partners:

- Include them in the conversation and in infant care
- Ask them how they are doing
- Give them permission to not be okay
- Reach out to them to provide medical updates

