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WHEN DREAMS BECOME NIGHTMARES: POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER SYMPTOMS IN MOTHERS OF NICU BABIES

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Introduction: Having a critically ill baby in the NICU is very difficult to cope with, and mothers may feel a whole host of emotions as they cope with the loss of the last part of pregnancy, the dream of a healthy birth, the loss of the first weeks or months of their baby's life. This distress may resemble posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Objective: To examine mothers' responses to having a baby (preterm or full term) in neonatal intensive care unit and to determine if they fulfill the criteria for PTSD or depression.

Methods: Forty nine mothers of pre term babies and ten mothers of full term babies who had been hospitalized in NICU of Schneider Children's Hospital, Israel, were interviewed at the follow up clinic between 4-17 months after birth. The evaluation was carried out by one senior psychiatrist and was based on diagnostic criteria for PTSD and depression according to DSM-4 .Severity of PTSD was measured by PSS-sr and the severity of depression by HAMD-Distress factors in NICU setting were evaluated by Parental Stressor Scale (M&F&C Scale).

Results:

1. 50% of mothers of preterm babies and 40% of mothers of full term babies fulfill the criteria for PTSD (N.S.).
2. 25% (15/59) of the whole sample had moderate to severe PTSD.
3. A strong correlation between PTSD and severity of stress during hospitalization in NICU was found.

Conclusion: The development of later PTSD and depression can be predicted by maternal responses to hospitalization of her baby in NICU.