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Depression and young mothers in South Africa: what contribution does demographic and socio-economic characteristics play?

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ABSTRACT

Background

Mental illness contributes about 14% of the burden of disease in all regions of the world (Erskine et al., 2017). One of the challenges that female face is post-partum depression. Most researchers use an operational definition of postnatal depression period as lasting up to 6 months after delivery (Miller, 2002). If untreated may extend to clinical depression, which is the focus of this study.

Despite the prevalence of mental illness such as depression among youth in South Africa, studies that have examined both the effects and the contribution of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics in relation to young mothers (15-34 years) in South Africa, using a longitudinal and a nationally representative data, are on the sparse.

Youth are vital to the socio-economic development of the country, because they have more years to work to contribute to the gross domestic product of the country. Young mothers, therefore, as part of the youth cohort, play an equally important role as caregivers for the future generations (WHO, 2004). Yet, the neglected area of research is the contribution that demographic and socio-economic characteristics might play in influencing depression in the everyday life of young mothers (15-34 years) in South Africa. Thus, the study aimed to investigate the levels, effects and describe the contribution of demographic and socio-economic characteristics to depression among young mothers (15-34 years) in South Africa.

Objective

To investigate the levels of depression among young mothers (15-35) in South Africa, and the effects and the contribution of demographic and socio-economic characteristics to depression among this cohort.

Methods

This study is a retrospective longitudinal study using National Income Dynamic Study's (NIDS) Wave 1 and Wave 5. Descriptive statistics are used to track changes in different time points and to determine the prevalence of depression in both waves. Random effects logistic regression is used to determine the effects of demographic and socio-economic characteristics to depression throughout the waves. Also, a non-linear multivariate decomposition (MVDCMP) technique is used to quantify the demographic and socioeconomic factors contributing to depression.

Results

More than 20% of young mothers with one child or more have depression. The random effects results showed that being African was positively associated with increased odds of depression [OR 2,53, P-value: 0.000]. Being African also contributed to increased odds of depression by 9% [P-value: 0.000]. Age was found to have contrasting results from the two methods of analysis. Regression analysis found age to be positively associated and having an effect to depression [OR 1,05, P-value: 0.005]. Decomposition results found that age contributes to the decrease in depression among young mothers by 16,5% [P-value: 0.004]. Being unmarried was found to be a risk factor and associated with higher odds of depression [0R 1,63, P-value: 0.005]. The decomposition analysis revealed that being unmarried contributes to increased log odds of depression by 19% [P-value: 0.025]. Receiving grant, like age, had contrasting results between regression and decomposition results. Receiving grant among young mothers was positively associated with depression by a factor of 1,49 with a significance level >0.05 [OR 1,49, P-value: 0.297]. Decomposition analysis showed that receiving grant contributes to 10% decrease in depression among young mothers. Being employed was found to be a protective factor and negatively associated with depression among young mothers [OR 0,56, P-value: 0.007. Decomposition results revealed that being employed reduced depression by 39%.

Conclusion

Though young mothers, which are mostly African mothers, receive grant which contributes to taking care of their children, receiving grant is still a risk factor and is positively associated to depression because the receiving of grant help with the wellbeing of children and not necessarily impacts on the wellbeing of mothers. So, the conclusion drawn from this study is that being employed has a decreasing effect and is a protective factor against depression and contributes significantly to the decrease in depression among young mothers in South Africa.

Key words: Depression, young mothers, South Africa, decomposition, characteristics, longitudinal studies.