

## A QUANTITATIVE STUDY, TO IDENTIFY THE INCIDENCE OF BLADDER AND/OR ANAL INCONTINENCE AND /OR LOW MOOD AT SIX WEEKS OR NINE MONTHS POSTNATAL

### Aims of study

To investigate the potential association between bladder and /or anal incontinence and low mood six weeks or nine months after delivery, and to identify the rate of women who had reported incontinence problems to a health professional during that period.

### Study design, materials and methods

The study, undertaken in the context of an MSc in Advancing Practice, was conducted at three primary care health centres during a three months period in the UK in 2005. All postnatal women who were due a low mood screening at six weeks or nine months postnatal were invited to participate in the study. In conjunction with the routine six weeks and nine months postnatal health visitor's assessment of women's mood, using the Feelings and Moods in Motherhood Assessment Tool based on the Edinburgh postnatal depression scale (1), a self-completed continence questionnaire based on the Basingstoke symptom profile (2) was used to identify any potential links between any urinary symptoms of stress, urgency or overflow and/or anal symptoms such as incontinence of flatus or stool.

Based on an initial overall low mood rate of 15%, and estimating a rate of 30% of women presenting with incontinence, a 2-sided power calculation with alpha = 0.05, and 80 confidence determined a sample size of 114 for each period of time being investigated.

### Results

Three hundred questionnaires were distributed to women due a mood assessment during the three month sample period, 150 at six weeks and 150 at nine months. 61 (41%) were returned by the women attending the six week postnatal visit and 79 (53 %) by those attending the nine month visit. 12 (8%) questionnaires did not identify the timing of the postnatal visit. The prevalence of low mood was extremely high 50 (85%) at 6 weeks and 68 (87%) at 9 months. The number of women who reported leaking wind and stool was 28/57 (49%)  $p \leq .445$  at six weeks and 40/66 (61%)  $p \leq .005$  at nine months. The number of women who reported leaking urine was 24/59 (41%)  $p \leq .508$  at 6 weeks, and at nine months 39/70 (56%)  $p \leq .445$ .

The most common continence symptoms (Figure 1) were leaking on exertion 8/42 (37%) at 6 weeks and 31/70 (62%)  $p \leq .007$  at 9 months, frequency of urination at 6 weeks 14/42 (38%) and at 9 months (31/68 (62%)  $p \leq .204$ , only wet pants when leak at 6 weeks 16/32 (37%) and at 9 months 20/54 (63%)  $p \leq .239$ , incontinence of flatus 6 weeks 32/41(78%) and at 9 months 58/67 (87%)  $p \leq .249$ .

However only 20/97(21%) of women had reported their symptoms to a health care professional.

In the women identified as having low mood by the Feelings and Moods in Motherhood assessment, (Figure 2), the most frequent continence symptoms reported were incontinence of flatus at 6 weeks, 35/39 (90%) and at 9 months 57/66 (86%) (Figure 2), Only pants getting wet at 6 weeks 12/27 (44%) nine months 17/44 (39%), urinary frequency at 6 weeks 11/36 (30%) and at 9 months 24/59 (41%). Leakage of urine on exertion at 6 weeks 7/36 (19%) and at 9 months 23/60 (38%). The majority of women identified with low postnatal mood did not report symptoms of incontinence.

### Interpretation of results

Low Mood as well as either urinary or anal incontinence are significant problems in the postnatal period (3). However, the very low reporting rate for either anal or urinary incontinence suggests normalisation of the symptoms by mothers of young infants. This may be due to acceptance of changed body function after childbirth or lack of awareness of treatments available.

### Concluding message

The Primary Care Team needs to be aware of unreported postnatal incontinence. This may require training the primary care team to include continence screening and the development of a self completing continence questionnaire for mothers. The six week and nine month mood assessment appears to be an opportune time to screen for postnatal incontinence symptoms. Information regarding incontinence treatment and management may enable postnatal women to seek treatment earlier rather than waiting until becoming

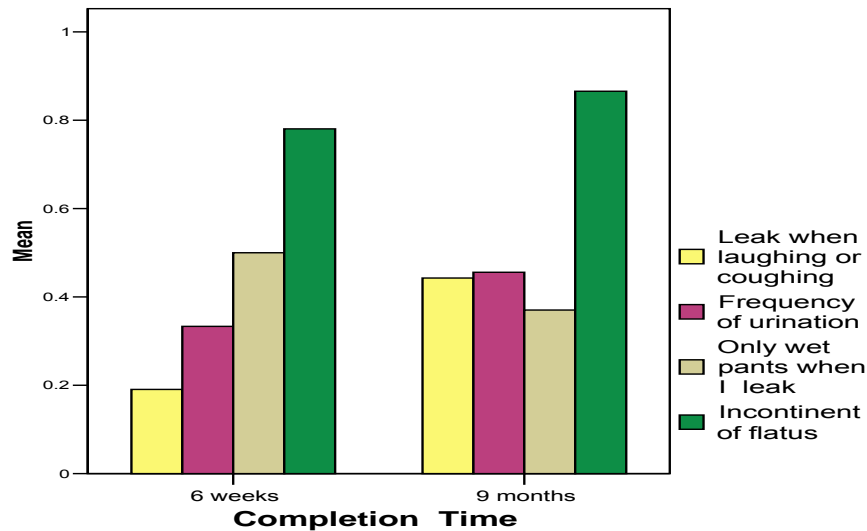


Figure 1. Most common incontinence symptoms at six weeks and nine months

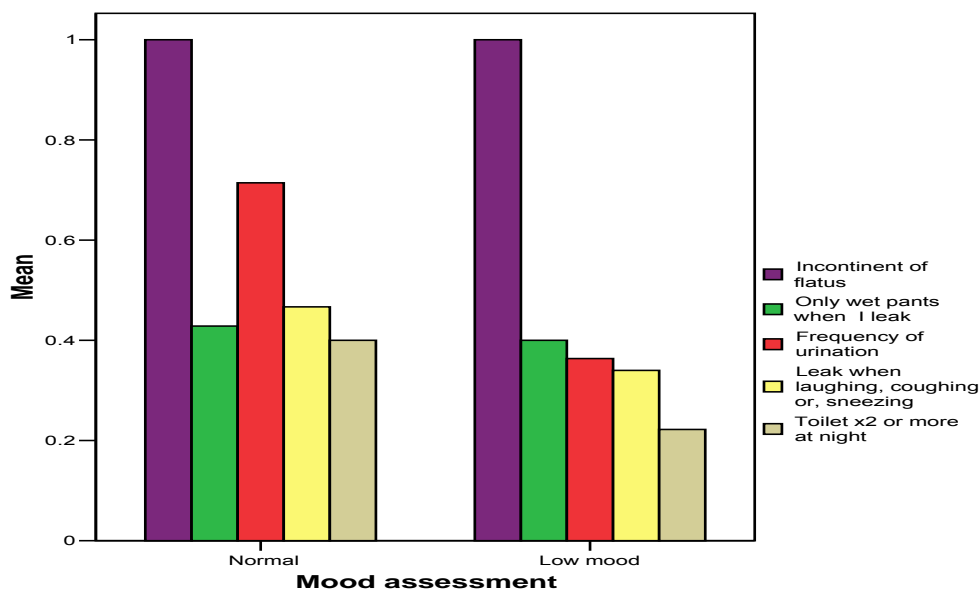


Figure 2. Mood assessment and incontinence symptoms.

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