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**“KEEP ON, KEEPING ON”: ONE MAN’S PHENOMENOLOGICAL
EXPERIENCE OF POSTNATAL DEPRESSION**

A study presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

of Master

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ABSTRACT

Postnatal depression has been documented as a disease/illness exclusively linked to mothers. The dominance of biological and psychological perspectives of postnatal depression in women, have upheld the dichotomy which seems to make postnatal depression in men inexaminable. In response to the lack of research into men's experience this study offers a trilogy that firstly examines a father and then a mother's separate perspectives on postnatal depression. The third dimension of this study aims to present an integrated view from this couple of postnatal depression. In order to achieve this, this work describes one man's perspective of the phenomenon of postnatal depression employing Crotty's (1996) mainstream phenomenological approach. Although the biological and psychosocial approaches show that postnatal depression is a very real disorder in some women's lives following childbirth, the phenomenological approach has identified the equally real disequilibrium that occurs in some men's lives when living with postnatal depression. The findings provide a detailed account of the co-researchers distress as he seeks to understand the essence of his experience of postnatal depression and realize the reality of his life-world. Thus potential health risks are identified which warrant further investigation that have implications for men's health.

PREFACE

Understanding Phenomenology

“I’ll try to give a personal, experiential account of the beginning of my fatherhood. How did “having children” enter my life? I remember several occasions when friends of ours would speak of the deep satisfaction of having children of their own. How it changed their way of looking at life and at the world. I always thought that I understood what they were saying (now I know that I did not). I countered that I felt no lack, no need for a family and argued, eloquently, I believe, how the children I taught at school gave me similar satisfactions without having to “possess” fatherhood, and privately considered my friends to be quite foolish. Talking to young parents is like talking to religious converts, I said to Judith, my wife. As we would return home, we would talk about how we prized ourselves lucky to be able to enjoy each other, our quiet, our books, and our freedom to do what we liked and to go where we pleased. Very occasionally Judith would speak of her doubt about our resolve not to have children at thirty-something and felt young. One day we visited Judith’s cousin, who had just given birth to her third child. I recall the chaos of the home – food smells, crackers, junk, stains, toys, and blankets. Altogether I felt somewhat repulsed at the greasiness of the child scene – such contrast to our home or my classroom. One moment stands out clearly. My wife had taken the newborn baby in her arms and then I felt strangely moved – she and this baby, so lovely – it seemed so right, good. The next time the topic of having children came up (I might have brought it up myself), I still resisted, but weakly. I doubted my ability to be an enthusiastic father: I told Judith a last time that I distrusted the world we live in; it seemed so foolish, so egotistical to put children in this madness. Secretly, I could hardly wait for our first child to be born. Yet at times I felt afraid. What if I could not love this child Judith was bearing? Feeling guilty, I only admitted my uncertainties to myself while talking supportively to my wife” (van Manen, 1984, p. 51-52). Copyright granted by kind permission of Max van Manen, personal communication, 26.9.00).

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KEY TO TRANSCRIPTIONS

The following symbols are used throughout this report:

p. = page

pp. = pages

(1:) = conversation number

(:1) = transcript number

Italics = the actual words of the co-researcher

... = words omitted from within the sentence in the transcript

.... = sentences omitted from within the transcript