Perinatal Stress, Mood and Anxiety Disorders
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Mood and anxiety disorders are very common during the perinatal period and confront us with specific needs. Thus, help seeking is often delayed due to shame and stigma, and diagnosis is often missed due to misinterpretation of symptoms. Services often do not adequately meet the needs of the women concerned as they do not take into account their specific situation, problems and fears. Untreated, peripartum disorders can have especially severe long-term consequences, not only for the mother but also for the whole family and especially for the child. Recent research has shown how maternal stress, anxiety and depression can adversely influence a child’s early and later development.

Despite this, perinatal mental health has until recently been very much neglected, overlooked, underdiagnosed and undertreated.

A recent surge of clinical and research interest, prompted by some very active pioneers in this field and also by media exposures of several very tragic outcomes of mothers who committed infanticide and/or suicide during an episode of postpartum depression, is a most welcome change in this field.

It is now widely accepted that mental disorders in the perinatal period need special attention and special treatments with modifications of the classical pharmacological, non-pharmacological and psychotherapeutic approaches. Universities around the world have started research programmes and implemented subspecialty clinics for perinatal mental health. Residency programmes in psychiatry and in obstetrics and gynaecology are including the topic in their curriculum and granting agencies have declared it a priority for research.

We have assembled a group of internationally renown experts in the field to contribute to this volume. The twelve articles included here offer a comprehensive
up-to-date overview of the most relevant research and treatment considerations in this neglected field.

A brief, though very interesting introduction to the history of psychiatry of motherhood is followed by the discussion of the old question if perinatal disorders are specific entities and if they should have a specific place in our classification systems.

Further articles focus on the effects of chronic maternal stress on fetal developmental outcomes and on the relationship between adversity in early pre- and postnatal life and the risk for later cognitive and behavioural impairments and chronic illness. Maternal depression during pregnancy and early childhood is shown to be one of the child’s earliest adverse life events which can contribute to a child’s vulnerability to later psychiatric illness. Both clinical as well as preclinical evidence is discussed.

In an article of outstanding importance for each clinician, the danger of perinatal infanticide and suicide is reviewed.

Further articles deal with specific forms and modifications of therapies for perinatal mental disorders. The relevance of gonadal hormones in the pathogenesis of perinatal mental disorders is discussed, an innovative field of research which could offer new therapeutic possibilities. The most important questions of pharmacotherapy during pregnancy and breast-feeding are discussed in depth. New psychotherapeutic approaches are presented such as interpersonal psychotherapy as well as a new form of group therapy for mothers with depression and anxiety disorders. Last but not least, ‘alternative’ treatment strategies for pregnant and breast-feeding women are reviewed.

This book is aimed primarily at clinicians, teachers and researchers from the fields of psychiatry (adult as well as child and adolescent psychiatry), obstetrics and gynaecology, paediatrics, psychology, psychotherapy, neurobiology and psychoneuroendocrinology as well as their students and learners.

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