Prevalence and correlates of suicidal ideation in Portuguese and immigrant pregnant women

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Introduction: Due to the acculturation, immigrants may be exposed to additional sources of stress that may predispose them to psychological distress or psychiatric disease, including depression and suicidal ideation. Several studies, but not all, found higher rates of suicidal behaviors in immigrants than in the host populations. However, the literature on perinatal suicidality in immigrant women is scarce.

Objectives: To analyze the prevalence and correlates of suicidal ideation in Portuguese and immigrant pregnant women in Portugal.

Methods: 491 Portuguese (mean age=29.62 years; sd=4.51) and 77 immigrant pregnant women (mean age=31.08 years; sd=4.61) completed the Portuguese versions of the Postpartum Depression Screening Scale (PDSS), the Beck Depression Inventory II (BDI-II), the Profile of Mood States (PoMS) and a questionnaire to assess demographic and obstetric data, self-reported health, sleep difficulties, social support, quality of life, and stress. The suicidal ideation level was assessed with the PDSS suicidal ideation subscale and the prevalence was calculated based on the positive/indecision answers to this subscale items.

Results: Portuguese and immigrant pregnant women did not significantly differ in suicidal ideation scores (M=5.36±1.44 and M=5.48±1.45, respectively; p=.584) and prevalence (1.8% versus 3.9%, respectively). In both groups, immigrant and Portuguese women, suicidal ideation was significantly associated with lower education level, increased parity and number of child, lower professional levels, poor quality of life, sleep difficulties, and high levels of depression (PDSS). Only in Portuguese women, the suicidal ideation was associated with the status “not married”, lower social support, lifetime poor physical health, previous history of insomnia, hopelessness, helplessness, low positive affect, high negative affect, high levels of depression (BDI-II Total) and high levels of psychosomatic symptoms (PDSS - Appetite/Sleep). Only in immigrant women, the suicidal ideation was associated with abortion and stress.

Discussion: Suicidal ideation levels and prevalence did not differ significantly between Portuguese and immigrant pregnant women, but there were similarities and differences in the correlates of suicidal ideation.

Conclusions: The immigrant condition confers some specificity to the factors associated with suicidal ideation. The findings from this study might have clinical implications in perinatal mental health, including in clinical interventions with immigrant women.

Supplementary material: Complete presentation available at http://ijcnmh.arc-publishing.org

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