

Book Review

When Postpartum Packs A Punch: Fighting Back and Finding Joy. Kristina Cowan. Amarillo, TX: Praeclarus Press, 2017. 280 pages. ISBN-13: 978-1946665003

When Postpartum Packs a Punch: Fighting Back and Finding Joy, by Kristina Cowan, showcases both personal experiences and evidence-based research on various mental health conditions surrounding postpartum mood disorders. This book serves as a guide for mothers, partners, and their families, as they experience the life-changing journey of childbirth and new parenthood. Mothers and their partners are provided with the necessary tools needed during the prenatal and postpartum period to identify symptoms and factors associated with traumatic childbirth experiences and/or postpartum depression. Cowan identifies and thoroughly explains the risk factors, prevalence, and symptoms associated with the most common illnesses arising from perinatal trauma; she incorporates the stories told by mothers and their partners and how they confronted this issue, as well as the current treatments being used to reduce the negative impact of traumatic births and postpartum depression and anxiety disorders.

Many mothers are unaware of the challenges that can take place during the prenatal and postpartum period, which may lead to improper treatment or lack of treatment altogether. Cowan addresses the five most common mental illnesses that women encounter around the sensitive time period of childbirth: prenatal/postpartum depression, prenatal/postpartum anxiety, prenatal/postpartum obsessive-compulsive disorder, postpartum post-traumatic stress disorder, and postpartum psychosis. She breaks down the framework into three parts: the illnesses, fighting back, and hope for the future.

First, Cowan speaks about the disorders, the evidence surrounding them, and the unknown facets about them. It was apparent, from Cowan's story and others, that there is a disconnect between many providers and mothers on the educational resources regarding postpartum depression and anxiety disorders. Many of the mothers felt as though these illnesses were overlooked, based on their past medical history and their support

system, and wished they could have been more informed. Next, Cowan acknowledges how women and their partners have helped heal these disorders, and the resources they used to improve their health. Lastly, Cowan ends with society's approach to postpartum traumatic disorders, what's currently being done, and what else we're missing to reach a renaissance.

In each chapter of *When Postpartum Packs a Punch: Fighting Back and Finding Joy*, Cowan uses evidence-based knowledge and stories from various mothers to unpack the emotional turmoil, symptoms, and risk factors associated with postpartum depression and anxiety disorders. Starting with her own personal journey and then using the stories of different women for every other condition, Cowan reveals that each illness occurs at a different time for each person, and can be triggered from past or current family trauma, financial obligations, self-doubt, fear, and/or anxiety. Each experience described in the book shows that at some point of their postpartum journey, the mother and/or their partner felt alone, confused, fearful, or unsure of themselves in some way, and was worried for the safety of their child, their partner, or themselves. By the end of the book, Cowan offers the foundation of true support and open communication, real life stories of how and what symptoms to identify, and a list of perinatal psychiatric inpatient and outpatient programs available for any person enduring this type of suffering. Although everyone's story is different, it was clear to see that accepting the severity of their condition was the first step to ensuring a successful recovery. In each story, once the individual spoke up about their illness and began working towards improving their health, they grew less irritable and more comfortable in themselves. It helped them to identify their stressors and other factors contributing to the trauma or mental health condition.

Through real life stories and treatments, Cowan approaches the negative stigma of postpartum depression in the simplest manner possible. *When Postpartum Packs a Punch: Fighting Back and Finding Joy* is a resource that all mothers, their partners, and families can utilize during the prenatal or postpartum period. It provides an outlet for those individuals who might not have anyone to confide in, feel alone, or feel lost or out of place. By reading this book, I gained so much insight about how to care for myself, my family members, and my future patients, as well as how to identify any risk factors, symptoms, or severe behavior changes during the perinatal period. Cowan avoided any negative stigma of perinatal mental health issues and recreated an outlook that will improve the recovery from childbirth-related traumatic experiences and mental illnesses, no matter how severe the condition might be.

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