Abstract:

Introduction: Parental stress and sleep disturbances are common in mothers of healthy infants; however, little is known about the health impacts among the mothers with a NICU hospitalized infant. The purpose of this study was to explore the relationships between perceived stress, sleep
disturbances, and well-being (depressive symptom, health-related quality of life [QOL]) of postpartum women who have an infant in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU).

**Method(s):** This was part of an on-going randomize clinical trial pilot study, and only the baseline data was reported here. First-time mothers (n=25), with a low birth weight (LBW) infant in the NICU were recruited and data were collected during their 2nd week of postpartum. Measurements included General Sleep Disturbance Scale (GSDS), Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS), Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), Impact of Events Scale (IES), and Medical Outcomes Short Form-36 version 2 (SF36-2).

**Results:** The mean age for the mothers is 27 ± 7 years with a majority of them being single (56%) and African American (76%). Mothers perceived abnormal stress levels measured by the PSS (14.5 ± 7) and IES (27.5 ± 12). They experienced poor daytime functioning (GSDS subscale=2.9 ±1.5) and depressive symptoms (EPDS 13 ± 4.9). Compared to the age-matched U.S. female population, this group of women reported worse QOL measured by the SF36v2. Mothers who perceived a higher global stress (PSS) and stress derived from infant’s hospitalization (IES) were also experiencing more sleep disturbances, more depressive symptoms, and poor mental health related QOL (p<.05).

**Discussion & Conclusions:** The stress levels derived from the infant’s hospitalization in this group of mothers is compatible with those who experience post-traumatic stress disorder. The relationships between perceived stress levels and sleep disturbances, depressive symptoms, and health-related QOL indicate mothers with a hospitalized LBW infant are vulnerable. The deteriorations in sleep, physical and mental health warrant a further study. Intervention is needed to decrease stress and promote sleep for new mothers, particular those with an infant cared in the ICU, during postpartum recovery.

**Abstract History:**
This abstract has not been presented or accepted for presentation in whole or in part at the SNRS or other scientific meeting.

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