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By: Stefan Anitei, Science Editor

Baby Boys Can Ruin Women's Lives

Increased post-natal depression and lower quality of life



If the newborn is a boy, that's bad news for the mother: this has been associated with increased levels of severe post-natal depression (PND) and lowered quality of life than in the case of a newborn girl, as found by a new study published in the *Journal of Clinical Nursing*. The team led by Professor Claude de Tychey, from Universite Nancy 2, France, made these findings on a pool of 181 women, aged 19 to 40 (on average 29). One third of the subjects had PND at four to eight weeks after delivery. 9 % of the subjects experienced severe PND and around 75 % of these women had just given birth to boys. But, even when boys' mothers did not have PND, they have significantly decreased quality of life, as compared with girls' mothers. "Post-natal depression is very common and poses a major public health problem, especially if it is not diagnosed and treated. The overwhelming finding of the study was the fact that gender appears to play a significant role in reduced quality of life as well as an increased chance of severe PND," said de Tychey. Women's quality of life was assessed through a questionnaire made of 36 questions, targeting 8 health dimensions: physical functioning, physical role, bodily pain, mental health, emotional role, social functioning, vitality and general health, on a 100-point scale. The data were combined with the gender of the newborn and PND (missing, mild or severe). It appeared that mothers of baby boys had lower quality of life in 70 % of cases compared to mothers of girls, no matter the PND degree. When quality of life results were added, women lacking PND had the highest quality of life (713 points) if they had a baby girl and 648 if they had delivered boys. In the case of women with PND, quality of life scores were 567 for mothers of girls in case of mild PND and 541 in case of severe PND. For mothers of boys, the scores showed 539 for mild PND and 498 for severe PND. Women who had delivered boys had lower quality of life in 90 % of categories, compared to mothers of girls. Women experiencing PND had lower quality of life scores in case of baby boys, decreased in 50 % of categories in case of mild PND and in 70 % of categories in case of severe PND. "These figures show very clearly that having a boy resulted in lower quality of life scores in all cases. We also discovered that being a first-time mother had no effect on quality of life scores. Women had the same general scores regardless of whether the recent birth was their first or second baby," said de Tychey. 52 % of the subjects had delivered boys. 61 % had their first babies (55 boys and 56 girls); the others had the second baby. Women having their second child were more likely to have a girl (59 %). "Previous studies have shown that women who live in cultures where greater value is placed on sons are more likely to suffer from PND if they give birth to a girl. However, we believe that this study - carried out in a French community where women didn't face cultural pressures over the sex of their baby - is the first to show that women who give birth to boys are more likely to suffer from severe PND and reduced quality of life. We believe that our findings have important public health consequences, as they point to the need for developing prevention and early psychotherapeutic programs for women giving birth to boys," said de Tychey.