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The Internal Life of a Pregnant Woman. Perinatal Psychotherapy

In our culture we tend to perceive the period of pregnancy and motherhood as the time of joy and fulfilment. The reality is more complex, though. The perinatal period i.e. pregnancy and the first year of child's life is the time of crucial changes in the life of a woman and her family – not only biological and bodily changes, but also completely new challenges, the formation of a new identity, the process of trying to adapt to a new role. This time can be an opportunity to further one's personal development, but the strong negative feelings can also emerge, old psychic scars can reappear and the mood can worsen. Many psychotherapists are afraid to work with a pregnant woman. In this presentation I will discuss the possibilities and limits related to the pregnancy considered as a developmental crisis. I will take a closer look at the possible understanding of the experience of giving birth. I will also speak about the challenges the therapist who decides to work with a woman in her perinatal period has to encounter.

Perinatal psychotherapy is a form of support that frequently arouses such questions as:

- What is the meaning of the way in which a woman becomes pregnant in the context of couple's relationship and the family?
- What meaning does the fact of being pregnant have for the particular woman's internal world? What is an embryo/foetus/child to her?
- How can a woman experience the presence of the other being inside herself? What is it like to have a body inside a body?
- What are the foetus' possibilities regarding the relationship with its parents?
- In what way our expectations concerning the child which is about to be born influence our attitude towards it and the relationship of attachment?
- Can the experience of giving birth cure past traumas?
- What can make the mother closer to her child after giving birth and what can make her distant towards it?
- What are the most frequent women's attitudes towards the maternal relationship?
- What is awaiting the child in its room i.e. how mother's experiences from the past make it difficult for her to see, understand and reflect the child?
- How can we understand the perinatal depression?

In this presentation I will try to point out the problems that a psychotherapist specialising in the perinatal period will have to encounter.