

Depression during pregnancy and early motherhood

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University of York researchers and their clinical NHS colleagues are expanding a project to investigate the health and wellbeing of newborn babies and their parents to include a study of depression during pregnancy and early motherhood.

The BaBY project (Born and Bred in Yorkshire) is a research study following a large group of mothers, their partners and babies from pregnancy onwards. It aims to find out more about the health and wellbeing of babies and their parents during pregnancy, labour and after birth.

It looks at factors such as maternal and obstetric health, mental and physical wellbeing of parents, and [child health](#). The project began at York Hospital in 2011 and has recently expanded to three more hospitals – Hull Royal Infirmary, Harrogate, and Scunthorpe and Goole. Already nearly 2,000 families are taking part and more than 1,000 BaBY babies have been born.

The expansion of BaBY also includes a newly-funded project called BaBY PaNDA. The focus of BaBY PaNDA, funded by the National Institute for Health Research Health Services and Delivery Research (NIHR HS&DR) Programme, is on identifying [depression](#) in women during pregnancy and early motherhood. Clinical depression during pregnancy or when a new baby arrives is believed to affect between one in five and one in ten mothers, with around half the cases of depression being missed.

One way of improving the identification of depression involves using brief questionnaires which ask women about possible symptoms. BaBY PaNDA is testing the effectiveness of two depression screening questionnaires for pregnant women and new mothers, using scientific methods to validate them. The questionnaires include an "ultra-brief" questionnaire recommended by NICE (The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence), and the EPDS (Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale) commonly used to identify postnatal depression.

Chief Investigator Professor Simon Gilbody from the Department of Health Sciences at the University of York and the Hull York Medical School leads the project.

Professor Gilbody said: "Clinical depression is an important problem for mothers, babies and families. Help can be offered when depression is identified, either through social support or specific treatments such as psychological therapy or medication. However, effective treatment relies on depression being identified in the first place.

"It is also unclear to what extent depression identified during pregnancy or motherhood is persistent and requires treatment, since many periods of depression are brief and require no treatment."

All women and their partners will be asked to complete wellbeing questionnaires once during pregnancy and at eight weeks and 12 months after their baby is born. Some women will also be asked to take part in interviews about depression in pregnancy and early motherhood (BaBY PaNDA). These will also take place at three time points, once during [pregnancy](#) and twice after birth. Additionally, a few women will be asked for their views on completing the depression screening questionnaires. Ultimately, the study will help researchers to establish if the NICE ultra-brief questionnaire and/or the EPDS should be used in routine clinical practice.

Provided by University of York

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