

# Dampening of positive feelings found to predict postpartum depressive symptoms

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Dampening was found to be a statistically significant predictor of women's depressive symptoms postpartum. Photo: Shutterstock

A new KU Leuven study shows for the first time that the dampening or suppression of positive emotions plays an important role in the development of postpartum depression. This has implications for the treatment of depressed mothers.

We often forget that depression is characterised by both negative feelings and a lack of positive feelings. Researchers suspect that this may have to do with the way depression-prone individuals deal with positive or happy feelings. These individuals downplay or suppress positive feelings through a cognitive response style called dampening. Typical dampening responses include: "These good feelings won't last, you'll see"; "I can't forget that things weren't always this good" and "I probably don't deserve to be this happy".

Professor Filip Raes (Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences) is the first to investigate whether dampening of [positive emotions](#) also lies at the root of postpartum depression.

The study polled around 200 women once during and twice after their pregnancies. The women answered a questionnaire between the 24th and 34th weeks of pregnancy to determine depressive symptoms and cognitive responses to negative and positive emotions. They were then polled for depressive symptoms at 12 weeks and 24 weeks postpartum.

In about 8% of the mothers, responses indicated symptoms consistent with postpartum depression. Dampening was found to be a statistically significant predictor of women's depressive symptoms postpartum. The more a mother indicated dampening responses to happy feelings, the higher the level of [depressive symptoms](#) experienced postpartum.

In contrast – and surprisingly – dwelling on negative feelings (depressive rumination) was not found to be indicative of [postnatal depression](#).

The results show for the first time that the suppression of positive feelings plays a significant role in depression. In determining the contributing factors of [postpartum depression](#), the manner in which respondents deal with positive feelings appears to be at least as important as – and in some cases even more important than – the manner in which they deal with negative feelings.

In turn, these findings point to a need for (preventive) treatment techniques to address the suppression or dampening of [positive feelings](#) alongside maladaptive responses to [negative feelings](#) (such as depressive rumination).

The researchers are currently working to develop a treatment method focused specifically on counteracting dampening. Existing methods, such as mindfulness, may also have a positive effect on dampening, say the researchers.

**More information:** The full study, published

online in the *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*,  
can be accessed at:  
[www.sciencedirect.com/science/...](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/...)  
[ii/S0022399914001895](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/.../S0022399914001895)

Provided by KU Leuven

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