

Research finds staying connected a key to beating baby blues

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Credit: University of Queensland

Women who maintain connections with their social groups after having a baby are at lower risk of developing postnatal depression, according to University of Queensland research.

UQ School of Psychology researcher Magen Seymour-Smith said [women](#) who positively embraced the new role of mother as part of their identity were less likely to experience depressive symptoms.

"Social identities have been found to foster resilience and a sense of

purpose, and they also form a big part of our self-concept which is especially important when people are going through a life transition, such as becoming a mother," Ms Seymour-Smith said.

"We gathered data from 387 women who had given birth in the previous 12 months and found that a decrease in group interactions after having a baby was associated with an increase in [depressive symptoms](#).

"Maintaining pre-existing group memberships predicted better mental health.

"Women who strongly identified as a mother – who felt that being a mother was an important and positive part of their identity – were less likely to experience [postnatal depression](#)."

The research, published in *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, examined whether women's [social groups](#) change during pregnancy and childbirth, and the impact this might have on their mental health after giving birth.

"On average, women experience a decline in their social group connections after having a baby," Ms Seymour-Smith said.

"This is not surprising, given the responsibilities of caring for a newborn and the fact that many women cease work, at least temporarily.

"The postpartum period presents the highest risk for women's [mental health](#) throughout their life."

Postnatal depression is estimated to affect 10 to 20 per cent of mothers.

Symptoms can include severely depressed mood, anxiety, fatigue, compulsive thoughts, loss of control, feelings of inadequacy, irrational

fears, and an inability to cope.

Ms Seymour-Smith will now run a social group program to help new mothers stay connected with the groups that matter to them.

Women who are pregnant or have recently had a baby can register their interest [here](#).

Mothers struggling with feelings of depression are urged to contact their doctor or call the National Perinatal Depression Helpline on 1300 726 306.

More information: Magen Seymour-Smith et al. Loss of group memberships predicts depression in postpartum mothers, *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* (2016). [DOI: 10.1007/s00127-016-1315-3](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-016-1315-3)

Provided by University of Queensland

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