

Postnatal depression has life-long impact on mother-child relations

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Postnatal depression (PND) can impact the quality of relationships between mother and child into adult life, and have a negative influence on the quality of relationships between grandmothers and grandchildren, new research at the University of Kent has discovered.

PND is well-known to have an adverse effect on mothers' relationships with their [children](#). This has a subsequent [impact](#) on child development from early infancy to adolescence and influences emotional, cognitive, and physical development in children.

Now, research led by Dr Sarah Myers and overseen by Dr Sarah Johns in the School of Anthropology and Conservation has found that PND continues to impact mother-child relationships into later life and affects multi-generational relationships too.

They surveyed 305 women mainly from the UK and US with an average age of 60 and who had given birth to an average of 2.2 children. Their children ranged in age from 8 to 48, with an

average age of 29 and many of whom now had their own children. This wide-ranging data set allowed them to assess the impact of PND over a longer time frame than has been hitherto examined.

Their data showed that women who had PND reported lower [relationship quality](#) with their offspring, including those children who are now adults and that the worse the PND had been the worse the later [relationship quality](#) was.

While mothers who experienced depressive symptoms at other times had worse relationships with all of their children, PND was found to be specifically detrimental to the relationship mothers had with their child whose birth triggered the PND.

This suggests that factors which affect mother-child relationships in early infancy can have lifelong consequences on the relationship that is formed over time.

Another discovery from the research was that women who suffer from PND with a child, and then in later life become a grandmother via that child, form a less emotionally close relationship with that grandchild. This continues the negative cycle associated with PND as the importance of grandmothers in helping with the rearing of grandchildren is well-documented.

The researchers hope the findings will encourage the ongoing development and implantation of preventative measures to combat PND. Investment in prevention will not only improve mother-child relationships, but also future grandmother-grandchild relationships.

The paper, titled Postnatal depression is associated with detrimental life-long and multi-generational impacts on relationship quality, has been published in the open-access journal *PeerJ*.

More information: Sarah Myers et al, Postnatal

depression is associated with detrimental life-long and multi-generational impacts on relationship quality, *PeerJ* (2018). DOI: [10.7717/peerj.4305](https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj.4305)

Provided by University of Kent

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