

# Women's Mental Health Up to Eight Years After Childbirth and Associated Risk Factors

Adhikari et al. (2022)

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## Background:

- Previous research has shown that almost 1/4 of women have elevated depression symptoms at some point in the 3 years after childbirth (21%).
- Some women will have elevated depression (12-16%) or anxiety (11%) symptoms for up to 7 years after birth.
- **Maternal mental health impacts child social, emotional and cognitive development.**
- Distal factors that indirectly impact maternal health include poor social support, previous mental health difficulties, low socioeconomic status, and history of adverse childhood experiences.
- Proximal factors that directly impact maternal health include time, finances, and marital stress.

## Study Goals:

- (1) Determine **prevalence of elevated maternal anxiety and/or depression up to 8 years** after childbirth, and
- (2) Determine the **association between role/ relationship strains** during parenting **and mental health challenges** from 3 to 8 years after childbirth.

## Methods:

- Women with a singleton pregnancy (N=2398) completed self-report questionnaires at 4 months, 1, 2, 3, 5 and 8 year after childbirth.
- Outcomes = maternal depression and anxiety.
- Exposures = time crunch, financial crunch, family/work responsibility, and partner relationship.



## Results:

- The predicted probability of maternal anxiety and/or depression was higher among women who experienced:
  - High levels of time crunch (21%)
  - High levels of financial crunch (22%)
  - Difficulties juggling family, work and other responsibilities (23%)
  - Poor partner relationships (23%)

Women who experienced **frequent difficulties juggling responsibilities** were **3.5 times** more likely to experience anxiety and/or depression than women without these difficulties.

Women with **stressful partner relationships** were **2.4 times** more likely to experience anxiety and/or depression symptoms.

**42%**

Of women had elevated anxiety and/or depression **at least once** 4 months to 8 years after childbirth.

**9% of women** experienced **persistent** anxiety and/or depression symptoms (3 or more time points).

## Implications:

- High levels of time and financial crunch, challenges with family or work responsibilities, and partner relationships could be targets for prevention/ management to help prevent and alleviate anxiety and depression symptoms in mothers, which in turn supports healthy child development (healthy mom -- healthy offspring).
- **Assessing maternal mental health continuously** after childbirth is important to support healthy child development and maternal well-being (e.g., integrated into primary care pathways).
- Future research should examine maternal mental health challenges as children enter adolescence; exactly which factors have time-dependent effects on maternal and child development outcomes?

