

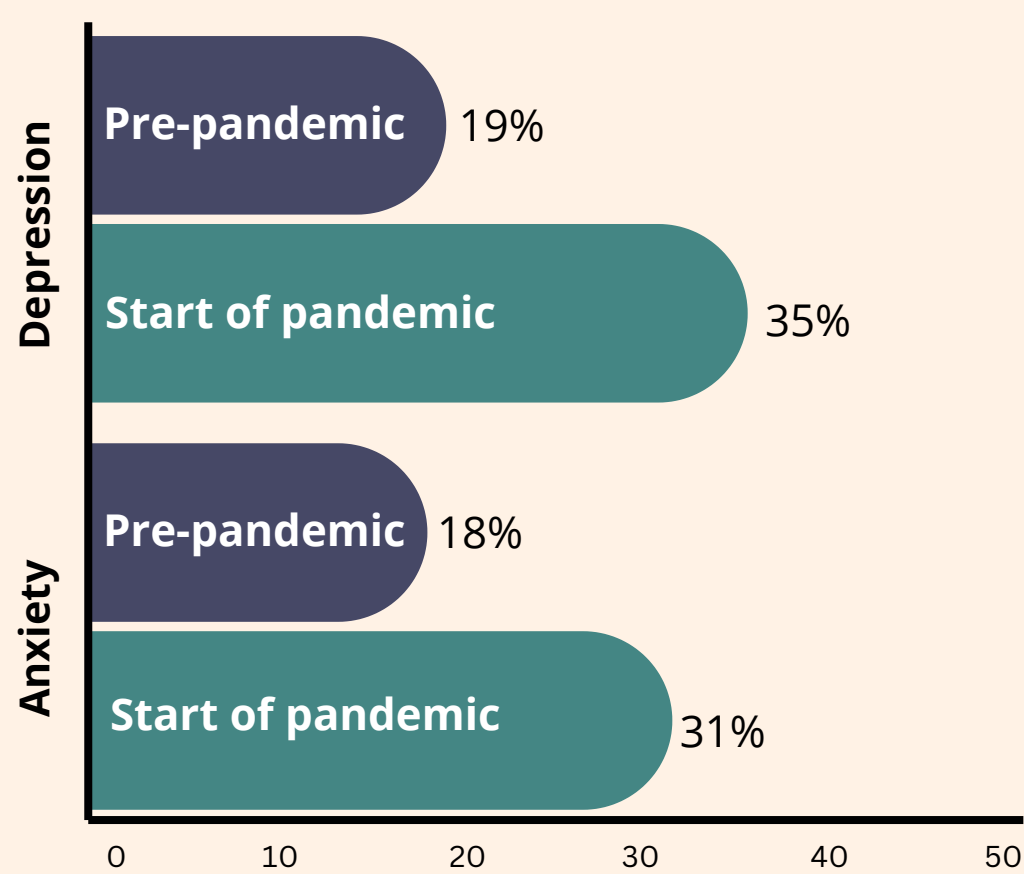
Changes in Maternal Mental Health During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Racine et al. (2023)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s00737-023-01339-8>

BACKGROUND

- Family stress during the COVID-19 pandemic influenced mental distress for mothers.
- At the start of the pandemic, symptoms of **depression** and **anxiety** nearly doubled among women:



- Little is known about the long-term influence of global health events (e.g. the COVID-19 pandemic) on mothers' mental health and family well-being.

METHODS

- Participants were part of the All Our Families study (AOF); ($n = 2152$) who had a middle-school aged child.
- Mothers' depression and anxiety symptoms were available from pre-pandemic questionnaires (2017-2019) and three surveys during the pandemic:
 - May-July 2020
 - March-April 2021
 - November-December 2021
- Factors thought to be associated with anxiety and depression included:
 - Maternal race & ethnicity
 - Maternal education & marital status
 - Partner relationship quality
 - Household income & pandemic-related financial impact
 - Difficulty balancing caregiving & household roles
 - Perceived stress & resilient coping

WHAT WE WANTED TO LEARN

- To understand how mothers' pre-existing depression and anxiety symptoms changed during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- To evaluate whether increased depression and anxiety symptoms remained elevated throughout the pandemic.
- To identify factors that influenced mothers' mental health symptoms over time.



WHAT WE LEARNED

- In women, **depression and anxiety** scores were high at the beginning of the pandemic and **remained high** until December 2021.
- For women with **depressive** symptoms **before** the pandemic, their symptoms got **worse** over time.
- Women who experienced the **most anxiety early in the pandemic** were those with pre-existing anxiety, higher education, high stress, and/or job or income loss.

Women who were better at **coping** with uncertainty and had **strong relationships** with their partners had **fewer** mental health symptoms when the pandemic started.



Women who were experiencing **high stress** likely took steps to **cope** to **reduce the impact** of the pandemic on their mental health.

WHAT THIS MEANS

- Individuals with **pre-existing** challenges with depression and anxiety symptoms are **especially vulnerable** to mental difficulties during stressful times.
- Having good **coping strategies** to manage uncertainty and a strong **relationship** with a partner may **protect against** depression and anxiety symptoms in times of increased stress, like the pandemic.

