

Maternal depression higher among certain ethnic minorities

Mothers who are Black or of First Nations ethnicity are at greater risk of experiencing stress and symptoms of depression during pregnancy and their children's first five years, according to CHILD research.

"We know that mothers from ethnic minorities in Canada have a higher risk for psychosocial distress than White mothers during their children's first five years of life," says Dr. Padmaja Subbarao (SickKids), Director of CHILD.

NUANCED PATTERNS OF DISTRESS ACROSS ETHNICITIES

"Our study showed that this pattern is more nuanced than previously thought; not all ethnic minority mothers experienced higher distress than White mothers. We found that First Nations and, to a lesser extent, Black mothers were the most at risk."

The research was published online in August 2018 in the [Canadian Journal of Psychiatry](#).

Dr. Subbarao and her team analyzed data from more than 3,000 mothers participating in the CHILD Study. Mothers completed detailed questionnaires about their distress levels throughout their pregnancy and until their children were five years of age. Mothers self-

identified their ethnicity as White Caucasian, First Nations, Black, Southeast Asian, East Asian, South Asian, Middle Eastern, Hispanic or mixed ethnicity.

Among all mothers, stress levels were highest during pregnancy, decreased after the birth of the baby, and increased again after the child reached the age of one or two years.

CONSISTENTLY HIGHER STRESS

"Black and First Nations mothers consistently reported the highest stress levels compared to all other ethnicities," says study first-author Christoffer Dhama, a research associate at McMaster University.

"This difference was significant, even after we controlled for other factors that may affect stress, such as social support, a history of depression, and socioeconomic status."

Although self-reported depressive symptoms may not always translate to clinical depression, it is important for family, friends and healthcare professionals to be aware of potential problems and to support a mother's psychological wellbeing both during and after pregnancy, notes Dr. Subbarao.

"With ethnic diversity in Canada increasing, it's vital that we address ethnically based differences in health risk, so that we can develop appropriate community programs and public health policies to ensure effective intervention strategies," she adds.



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