

Parental depression is associated with worse childhood mental health, educational attainment

November 17 2021

	Child depression (Adjusted Hazard ratios and 95% Confidence Intervals)	Achieving Key Stage 1 (Odds ratios and 95% Confidence intervals)	Achieving Key Stage 2 (Odds ratios and 95% Confidence intervals)	Achieving Key Stage 3 (Odds ratios and 95% Confidence intervals)
Mother depressed before the birth	1.30 (1.20–1.41)	0.74 (0.71–0.78)	0.82 (0.77–0.87)	0.81 (0.76–0.87)
Mother depressed after the birth	1.92 (1.88–1.96)	0.68 (0.66–0.70)	0.71 (0.69–0.73)	0.64 (0.62–0.66)
Mother depressed before and after the birth	2.11 (2.02–2.22)	0.59 (0.58–0.62)	0.66 (0.63–0.69)	0.63 (0.60–0.66)
Deprivation (Quintile 5-most deprived)	1.62 (1.56–1.68)	0.37 (0.36–0.39)	0.36 (0.34–0.38)	0.28 (0.27–0.29)

*hazard ratio compared to mother with no history of depression.

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0258966.t003>

Table 3. Risk of depression in child if mother had depression, adjusting for deprivation (clustering on mother ID). Credit: Brophy et al., 2021, *PLOS ONE*, CC-BY 4.0 (creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Children who live with a parent who has depression are more likely to develop depression and to not achieve educational milestones, according to a new study published this week in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* by Sinead Brophy of Swansea University, UK, and colleagues.

Maternal depression is a known risk factor for depression in [children](#) and is associated with a range of adverse child health and [educational outcomes](#) including poorer academic attainment. To date, however, risk

factors associated with [paternal depression](#) have been less well examined. Understanding the effects of timing of both maternal and paternal depression of offspring outcomes has implications for prevention and early intervention.

In the new study, Brophy and colleagues used data from the Secure Anonymised Information Linkage (SAIL) databank assembled as part of the Born in Wales Study funded by the Welsh Government. Information on children born in Wales from 1987 to 2018, as well as their mothers and fathers—or stable, adult male figure in the same household—was used in the study. Both parental and child diagnosis of depression was attained from general practitioner records in the SAIL databank.

Overall, 34.5% of [mothers](#) and 18% of fathers/stable men had a diagnosis of depression. In offspring, 4.34% of all children, 2.85% of boys, and 5.89% of girls were diagnosed with depression. Children were more likely to develop depression if their mother had depression before their [birth](#) (HR 1.32, 95% CI 1.21-1.43), after their birth (HR 2.00, 95% CI 1.96-2.05), or both before and after their birth (HR 2.25, 95% CI 2.15-2.35). The risk of depression was also increased when their father/stable man had depression before their birth (HR 1.44, 95% CI 1.18-1.74), after their birth (HR 1.66, 95% CI 1.58-1.74), or both before and after their birth (HR 1.47, 95% CI 1.25-1.73). In addition, the odds of achieving milestones at the end of primary school were significantly decreased if either parent had depression—for instance, the odds of passing Key Stage 3 (KS3) tests was 0.57 (95% CI 0.55-0.60) if a child's mother had depression both before and after their birth and 0.56 (0.49–0.63) if their father/stable man had depression both before and after their birth. Other [risk factors](#) for children's depression identified in the study included being female, their mother taking antidepressants and having no stable man in the household. The authors conclude that the impact of paternal depression requires more attention than has previously been given, and suggest that holistic approaches to whole

family wellbeing and depression will help ensure [positive outcomes](#) for children.

The authors add: "Children who live with a parent (mum or dad) who has depression are more likely to also develop depression and not achieve as well in school, compared to children who live with a parent with treated depression. Working with families and treating parental depression (in dads as well as mums) is likely to have long-term benefits for children's mental health and educational attainment. This has never been more important than after lockdown and COVID, as [depression](#) is contagious too."

More information: Brophy S, Todd C, Rahman MA, Kennedy N, Rice F (2021) Timing of parental depression on risk of child depression and poor educational outcomes: A population based routine data cohort study from Born in Wales, UK. *PLoS ONE* 16(11): e0258966. doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0258966

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