

Depression in teenage years linked to maternal postnatal depression

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(Medical Xpress) -- Research by the University of Reading shows that children of postnatally depressed mothers are more likely to suffer from depression themselves than those of non-depressed mothers.

Of those studied, researchers discovered that by the age of 16, 41.5% of the children whose [mothers](#) had suffered with the condition had also experienced an episode of depression. The rate in the group whose mothers did not suffer from [postnatal depression](#) (PND) was 12.5%.

The study, 'The Maternal Postnatal Depression and the Development of Depression in Offspring Up to 16 Years of Age', by Professor Lynne Murray of the Department of Psychology looked at 100 first-time mothers (58 with postpartum depression) over a 16-year period. The mothers and their children were evaluated at 18 months, and aged 5, 8, 13 and 16.

The research found that children whose attachment to their mothers was insecure during infancy were much more likely to go on to suffer depression. In addition, lower child ego resilience, measured at years 5 and 8, was associated with an increased risk of depression. Marital conflict and further maternal depression, extending beyond the postnatal period, were significantly associated with offspring lifetime depression.

In the sample, boys of depressed mothers were more likely than girls to be insecure and less resilient, possibly reflecting a more general vulnerability to postnatal depression.

Professor Murray said: "At least one-third of people experience a major depressive episode during their lifetime, and for many individuals the experience is persistent. Understanding the development of depression is, therefore, an important public health issue. This is especially true when first onset occurs in the school-age years, as such episodes

are associated with particularly poor outcome in terms of severity, chronicity, and recurrence.

"The substantially raised risk for depression among offspring of postnatally [depressed mothers](#) underlines the importance of screening for PND and of delivering early interventions. Moreover, as this risk could, in part, be traced back to infant insecure attachment to the mother, and as treatments directed only at alleviating maternal [depression](#) do not appear to benefit the mother-child relationship, interventions focusing on promoting good parental care are desirable."

The study was supported by grants from the Medical Research Council and the Tedworth Charitable Trust. The paper is published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* and online at www.jaacap.org.

Provided by University of Reading

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