

# UQ Research Finds A Mother's Mental Health Can Impact On Children

Teenagers whose mothers have mental health impairments are likely to suffer behavioural problems, [UQ](#) research has found.

Using data from the Mater-University Study of Pregnancy (MUSP), recent PhD graduate Belinda Lloyd studied maternal mental health and its impact on children.

The MUSP is a longitudinal study of more than 7000 mothers and their children born at Brisbane's Mater Hospital between 1981-83.

"Children whose mothers experienced mental health problems as their children grew older (during adolescence) had substantially elevated rates of the behavioural and mental health problems measured in the study," Dr Lloyd said.

"Also, children whose mothers experienced recurrent mental health problems were significantly more likely to display behavioural and mental health problems.

"The impact of maternal mental health problems on children was found to vary, with the timing and recurrence of maternal [anxiety](#) and depression being important."

Dr Lloyd said while there was a great deal of research and media interest surrounding postnatal depression, there had been less focus on the mental health of mothers over the course of child rearing.

Antenatal and postnatal depression alone were found to have no negative impact on children, a finding Dr Lloyd hopes may help reduce the stigma surrounding the conditions.

"This finding challenges popular beliefs that antenatal/postnatal anxiety and depression have long-lasting detrimental impacts on child behaviour and mental health," she said.

"Self-doubt, feelings of guilt and social stigma could be alleviated knowing impaired maternal mental health is not necessarily going to compromise a child's mental health and wellbeing into adolescence and beyond."

The study found mothers were more likely to experience mental health problems as their children became adolescents, a link which had not previously been adequately explored or documented.

"As children grow, there are increasing and more complex demands placed on parents," Dr Lloyd said.

"Also, as children grow, parental marital and other intimate relationships are more likely to deteriorate or end, potentially increasing the financial, social, emotional and practical pressures and responsibilities faced by individual parents."

Dr Lloyd said the research could inform health professionals of the need to support the mental health needs of mothers as their children grow.

"There is capacity for a more holistic approach to child mental health and behaviour that considers the health and wellbeing of parents as a significant factor in child outcomes," she said.

"A focus on maternal mental health over the lifecourse instead of isolated periods has the potential to improve the health of women and children, and therefore families and the community."

Dr Lloyd's PhD was completed through UQ's [School of Population Health](#) under the supervision of Professor Jake Najman, Professor Gail Williams and Dr Stuart Kinner.

Source

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