

New research challenges stereotypes about older mums

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(PhysOrg.com) -- New research on first-time older mums has found they cope surprisingly well with the physical demands of pregnancy compared to younger mums, but are understandably more anxious about the well being of their unborn baby.

The research findings were presented by Macquarie University psychologist, Dr Catherine McMahon, at the European Society of [Human Reproduction](#) & Embryology conference held in Amsterdam last week.

“Generally it has been thought that older mums may not cope with the physical demands of [pregnancy](#) as well as younger mums, or they may be very anxious or find it difficult to cope with lifestyle changes,” McMahon said. “But what we found was that even though there are some differences, older mums were generally adjusting well.”

The study followed women of different ages - in their 20s, 30s and 40s - from their third trimester of pregnancy until four months after the birth of their baby. In a first, the researchers looked both at age and infertility as factors influencing adjustment.

The Australian Research Council funded project was led by McMahon, from the Centre for Emotional Health and Dr Frances Gibson from the University’s Institute of Early Childhood in partnership with Associate Professor Jane Fisher from the University of Melbourne, and partner organisations IVF Australia and Melbourne IVF.

The aim of the study was to assess the impact of parental age and IVF conception on physical health, well being and psychological adjustment during the transition to first-time parenthood.

Interestingly, there were no age differences in physical health, discomforts of pregnancy and overall mood, with the older mothers indicating similar levels of exercise and physical activity to their younger counterparts.

There were some age differences in other areas, however.

“Older mums expressed greater anxiety about the well being of their unborn baby, as you might expect given well publicised evidence of higher rates of obstetric complications in this age-group,” McMahon said.

Having analysed the physical and psychological experiences of the older mums during pregnancy, the researchers are currently turning their attentions to how the mothers and their babies coped in the first few months after birth. Dr McMahon said results of the study will identify areas where first-time parents may need more support.

Provided by Macquarie University

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