

Even dads get the baby blues: study

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It's not just mothers who get the baby blues -- a significant number of dads also suffer from depression before or after a baby's birth, a study published Tuesday showed.

Around 10 percent of fathers experience prenatal or [postpartum depression](#), and US dads are more likely than their foreign counterparts to feel glum pre- or post-birth, according to the study, published in a special mental health issue of the [Journal of the American Medical Association](#).

Baby blues among fathers peaked during the three to six months after the infant's birth, when 25.6 percent of dads experienced depression, said the study, led by James Paulson of the Eastern Virginia Medical School.

Fourteen percent of US dads experienced prenatal or postpartum depression compared with 8.2 percent internationally, it shows, leading to a call from the authors for "further investigation vis-a-vis varying social norms and postpartum work practices" in different countries.

The researchers, who analyzed data from 43 different studies involving more than 28,000 participants, also found that the rate of dads who get the baby blues is more than twice the 4.8 percent of men in the general population who reported a bout of depression in a 12-month period.

Mothers are roughly twice as likely as dads to get the baby blues: nearly 24 percent were found to suffer depression related to [pregnancy](#) or the

birth of a baby.

Like fathers, maternal baby blues tended to peak during the three- to six-month period after the baby's birth, when nearly 42 percent of mothers reported feeling depressed, the study says.

Often, if the mother suffers the baby blues the father will too, and as with [maternal depression](#), paternal depression can have substantial emotional, behavioral and developmental effects on children, the study says.

The study calls for more efforts to be made to improve screening and referral of fathers for pre- and post-natal depression, "particularly in light of the mounting evidence that early paternal depression may have substantial emotional, behavioral and developmental effects on children."

The researchers also suggest that prevention and intervention efforts for depression focus on the couple and family, rather than the individual.

More information: JAMA. 2010;303[19]:1961-1969.

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