

Mother's education impacts depression in her children

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(Medical Xpress)—Children of women who did not finish high school were twice as likely to experience a major episode of depression in early adulthood as children whose mothers obtained a high school diploma, according to a new study by researchers at McGill University.

"Our research indicates that a mother's lack of [high school education](#) has a robust impact on her child's risk of major depressive episode in early adulthood," said Amélie Quesnel-Vallée, senior author of the study. Indeed, the increased risk of depression among children of mothers with less than a high school education could not be attributed to parental history of depression, early life [adversity](#) or the children's own education and income in early adulthood.

This study is the first in Canada to distinguish the impact of mother's and father's education on depression in early adulthood. The study employed a sample of 1,267 participants from Statistics Canada's National Population Health Survey. The respondents were first interviewed in 1994, when they were between 12 and 24 years old, and living with their parents. They were then followed for 12 years, and their risk of [major depressive episode](#) was assessed when they were between 22 and 36 years old.

"Depression in [early adulthood](#) strikes at a critical time. An individual may be pursuing studies or apprenticeships, or starting a career or a family. A [disruption](#) caused by depression can potentially derail these events and have lifelong consequences", says Quesnel-Vallée.

Interestingly, the father's level of education had no impact. "This, along with the fact that the effect of mother's education was not explained by the children's own education or income, suggests that mothers' [parenting skills](#) may be at play here," according to Quesnel-Vallée.

"Education gives people practical skills, such as communication, analytical and problem-solving skills, as well as an increased sense of mastery" says Alison Park, a researcher at the Institut National de Santé Publique du Québec who worked on this research in the course of her Master's degree under Quesnel-Vallée's supervision. "A better-educated mother might be more confident in coping with difficulties arising from child-rearing. This increased confidence and feeling of self-mastery might serve as a model for her children."

The McGill study "Life course socioeconomic position and major depression in Canada" is published in *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*. bit.ly/Parketal_2013

Provided by McGill University

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