

# No money for diapers: A depressing reality for poor mothers

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Low-income mothers who cannot afford diapers are also more likely to report symptoms of depression and anxiety, Yale University researchers write in the August issue of the journal *Pediatrics*.

Three in 10 poor mothers report they cannot afford an adequate supply of [diapers](#), the study found.

"As researchers, we tend to look at how poverty impacts mental health in general terms, but we do not often think of specific mechanisms whereby poverty contributes to the mental health of women and mothers," said Megan Smith, assistant professor of psychiatry at the Yale School of Medicine and principal author of the study. "A significant finding in this study is that we have identified a unique and potentially modifiable mental health risk factor for mothers."

Smith added that the finding had implications for children. "A parent's mental health affects a child's development," she said. "High levels of stress and depression in a parent can be associated with low achievement in school and [mental health problems](#) that can follow a child for a lifetime."

Smith said the idea to examine diapers came from over 1,000 mothers interviewed by the by the New Haven Mental health Outreach for MotherS (MOMS) Partnership, an innovative partnership between Yale and seven local and state agencies to support and study the mental health of low-income mothers in New Haven. MOMS offers stress

management classes for mothers in New Haven public housing, trains a workforce of community health workers and has created MOMS Hubs, where families can get a broad range of services in their neighborhoods in a supportive atmosphere.

Women cannot use [food stamps](#) under the federal SNAP (food stamp) program to purchase diapers and usually do not have washing machines to clean cloth diapers. Inadequate diaper supply can affect a mother's ability to attend work programs and training since most child care providers require that parents provide an adequate supply of disposable diapers. In other research, the MOMS Partnership has found that diaper need was an even stronger predictor of [mental health](#) need than food insecurity. The survey of 877 low-income women showed that Hispanics and grandparents caring for children were most likely to report difficulty in affording diapers.

Smith recommends that pediatricians ask low-income mothers whether they have access to enough diapers and refer mothers in need to local diaper banks.

Provided by Yale University

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