

How early motherhood back pain affects back strength and function

May 29 2014, by David Stacey



A world-first study by a researcher from The University of Western Australia is calling for volunteers to help unravel why being a mum may cause years of back pain and dysfunction.

Occupational bio-mechanist and PhD student Adele Stewart says early motherhood causes back pain for up to 90 per cent of women, but it's not known if back strength and function are similarly affected. Her study will be the first to examine this question.

"Pain is a complex and [personal experience](#) and not always a sign that something is wrong - but the combination of pain and dysfunction often is," Ms Stewart said.

"Pregnant women and new mothers are frequently told 'back pain is part of the journey - accept it', but in reality it could mean an increased risk of injury.

"This research will look at changes in [back pain](#) and movement and the influence of hormones over time. We will pay special attention to serum relaxin - a [female hormone](#) which causes ligaments and joints to weaken and is produced in high quantities during pregnancy."

Ms Stewart said a weakened lower back increased the risk of injury - a particular issue when it comes to childcare work.

According to international health and safety standards in manual handling, a child is a 'high risk load'. Despite being one of the most strictly regulated workplaces, commercial childcare has a higher rate of back injury than any other work place.

"Obviously there is something about childcare work in particular that causes back injury; but this could be made exponentially worse for pregnant and new mums caring for young children," Ms Stewart said. "It's possible that back disorder in early motherhood, being made worse by childcare, is setting women up for years of back problems.

"We can't effectively limit or treat back [pain](#) and disorder in these women, nor create efficient childcare furniture and equipment, until we know more. Simply, no-one has investigated enough to connect the dots."

Provided by University of Western Australia

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