

Mothers rigid in parenting skills at risk for depression

June 10 2014, by Jared Wadley



(Medical Xpress)—The baby's ear-piercing, nonstop crying at the grocery store, in church or on an airplane can leave most mothers frustrated as bystanders observe how she will quiet the restless child.

How the mother evaluates and handles this challenging parenting moment could determine if she's susceptible to depression, according to

a new University of Michigan study.

Mothers are often overly concerned about being the "perfect parent" based on society's expectations, which are formed from the media, family interactions and medical professionals. These [unrealistic expectations](#) and pressure can negatively affect a woman's [mental health](#), said Elizabeth Thomason, the study's lead author.

"Kids are supposed to be perfect and well behaved, and if that's not the case it negatively reflects on you as a parent through public perception," said Thomason, a research fellow at U-M's School of Social Work.

The study explored how [women](#) view themselves as a parent and the rigidity of those beliefs in relation to other mothers. About 113 Midwestern women completed a questionnaire about depression and parental competence. During pregnancy and postpartum, the statements which they could agree or disagree included: "I should do everything for my baby myself," "Other mothers have fewer parenting difficulties than I do" and "I feel guilty when I put my needs before the needs of my baby."

A woman who is more rigid in believing that "good" [mothers](#) must be able to calm their crying babies may be more susceptible to feeling depressed because she is more focused on what other people think of her [parenting skills](#).

When a woman understands that being a mother isn't always a positive experience, her beliefs are described as flexible. This could also mean she is willing to ask for help and is able to express that being a parent is difficult.

"If the baby is the misbehaving, it doesn't make you a bad mother. It's a matter of developing strategies, but they can be challenging," Thomason

said.

Thomason noted that additional research is needed since many women in the study had high levels of education and income, as well as partners. Nevertheless, the study represents a first step to closely examining how women internalize societal expectations about motherhood, she said.

Provided by University of Michigan

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