

Misunderstood mothers-to-be internalise stress

June 4 2015, by Robert Burgin



Pregnancy: A discrepancy between the ideal and reality has been established as a known trigger for depression and anxiety.

The role that stigma around mental health plays in the stress of a pregnancy – and birth complications - has been thrust into the spotlight by a study from researchers at The University of Queensland.

PhD candidate Aleksandra Staneva from UQ's School of Psychology collaborated with Associate Professor Fiona Bogossian from UQ's School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work on the study.

Among the key findings was a need for [psychological assessment](#) to place greater importance on the environment surrounding the mother-to-be, rather than focusing solely on her own coping mechanisms.

"In our research the women who felt misunderstood by their partners, alone, and lacking support and resources chose to silence their true voices," Ms Staneva said.

"This appears to have profound impact on their emotional state, and potentially on their birth experiences and postnatal adjustment to motherhood.

"Possible outcomes include poor attachment with the baby, [postnatal depression](#) and stress-related risks to the child of [preterm birth](#), [low birth weight](#) and various other birth complications."

Canvassing input from 128 women, The experience of [psychological distress](#), depression and anxiety during pregnancy appears in the journal *Midwifery*.

Gaps in previous literature on the subject are highlighted, particularly the absence of research using a "feminist lens".

"The review provides further understanding on the sometimes unrealistic and romantic expectations of motherhood and pregnancy," Ms Staneva said.

"These can result in feelings of inadequacy, defeat and isolation, all of which may contribute to and perpetuate distress.

"A discrepancy between the ideal and reality has been established as a known trigger for depression and anxiety."

Research uncovered several points of conflict for mothers, with the responsibility of their infant's well-being described as both frightening and empowering.

Some women also reported that being informed about the risks and apprehensions of pregnancy only increased their anxiety, rather than creating a sense of preparedness.

More information: "The experience of psychological distress, depression, and anxiety during pregnancy: A meta-synthesis of qualitative research." [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.midw.2015.03.015](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.midw.2015.03.015)

Provided by University of Queensland

Citation: Misunderstood mothers-to-be internalise stress (2015, June 4) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-06-misunderstood-mothers-to-be-internalise-stress.html>

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