

Study shows helping pregnant moms with depression doesn't help kids

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A long-term study of mother-child pairs in Pakistan has found that the children turn out pretty much the same, whether or not their mothers received treatment for depression during pregnancy.

An earlier study of the same population found that the mothers themselves benefited from the treatment, with less [depression](#), and

demonstrating related healthy behaviors with their newborns, such as breastfeeding. But those improvements were short-lived.

The "Thinking Healthy Programme" is a successful depression intervention evaluated through a randomized trial among a group of pregnant women seven years ago. A reference group of [pregnant women](#) who did not suffer from depression were added in the current study.

Researchers looked specifically at the women's now-7-year-old [children](#). Perinatal depression has been linked to negative child development outcomes by past studies; this is the first large scale study of a maternal depression intervention from a low- or middle-income country to provide additional evidence of this connection.

The treatment didn't improve the children's outcomes and all children of depressed moms had worse outcomes on emotional and behavioral measures relative to children whose moms did not have prenatal depression. The cognitive and physical outcomes did not differ between the two groups.

"The findings are significant because they suggest that treatment for depression in the perinatal period, even if successful, is not enough to improve a child's developmental trajectory," said Joanna Maselko, professor of global health at Duke University, and the study's lead author.

"Maternal depression affects [child development](#)—which we have seen previously and which this study reinforces—and efforts to diminish its effects should be an integral part of maternal and child health programs," she said.

The findings will be published in the June 3, 2015 edition of *The Lancet Psychiatry*.

This research is funded through the Saving Brains Programme of Grand Challenges Canada, which is funded by the government of Canada. The program supports bold ideas to promote healthy brain development in the first 1000 days with lasting impact on human capital in low-and middle-income countries, so children and societies can reach their full potential.

In addition to Duke's Maselko, the team included researchers from the Human Development Research Foundation in Pakistan, and University of Liverpool and University of Essex, both in the United Kingdom.

More information: *The Lancet Psychiatry*,
[www.thelancet.com/journals/lan... \(15\)00109-1/abstract](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lan... (15)00109-1/abstract)

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