

# Researchers pioneering new research into maternal trauma and wellbeing

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New research projects from the Centre for Maternal and Child Health Research at City University London are exploring how to help women following birth trauma as well as improve wellbeing during pregnancy.

Research shows that 1 in 5 [women](#) find labour and childbirth traumatic in the UK. Some of these women will go on to develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) but this remains largely unrecognised in maternity services. Unlike depression, PTSD is not routinely screened for so women with PTSD are unlikely to be identified and treated.

One of the barriers to screening for PTSD is that there are no validated questions or questionnaires for postnatal PTSD. Research in this area has typically used questionnaires developed for use with other groups, such

as war veterans, which are not as applicable to women after birth. Recent changes to [diagnostic criteria](#) made by the American Psychiatric Association in 2014 also mean questionnaires used before are now outdated.

In an aim to change this Professor Susan Ayers and colleagues have developed the City Birth Trauma Survey, a questionnaire measure of PTSD specifically for postnatal women that measures all of the latest diagnostic criteria. This questionnaire has been developed, reviewed and revised by a group of perinatal researchers and [postnatal women](#) in our research advisory group. It was then put online and completed by over 900 women. Speaking about the study, Professor Ayers, lead of the Centre for Maternal and Child Health Research, said:

"The questionnaire was put online and provoked a huge response, with over 900 women completing it in a few days. We are now testing the questionnaire for psychometric properties so it can be refined for use by clinicians and researchers to screen for PTSD in maternity services.

"This study is an important step towards providing an up-to-date, valid measure of postnatal PTSD that can be used in research and maternity services to identify women with PTSD who need treatment." Other research in the Centre for Maternal and Child Health at City is also looking into wellbeing in pregnancy and the impact of trauma after birth. In pregnancy, researchers are evaluating the 'Wellbeing Plan', which was created by the Boots Family Trust Alliance to improve emotional wellbeing, or mental health, in pregnancy and reduce stigma around perinatal mental health problems ([blogs.city.ac.uk/wip/](https://blogs.city.ac.uk/wip/)). After birth, researchers are evaluating online treatments for postnatal anxiety and looking at the impact of birth trauma on the mother-baby relationship ([blogs.city.ac.uk/mchresearch/](https://blogs.city.ac.uk/mchresearch/)).

Provided by City University London

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