

Pre-existing mental health conditions in men linked to problems during transition to parenthood

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Credit: Murdoch Children's Research Institute

New research by the Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI) has shown that men with a history of common mental health problems are four times more likely to experience mental health problems during their partner's pregnancy.

This research builds on previous findings, which have shown that one in 10 men experience [mental health problems](#) during their [partner's](#) pregnancy.

MCRI researchers used data from a 20-year study that had assessed common mental [health](#) problems nine times from ages 14-29 years. The men were then followed up during the third trimester of their partner's subsequent pregnancies.

The study, published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry Open*, shows that for a majority of new fathers, mental health problems during their partner's pregnancy are a continuation of similar problems, often dating back to adolescence or early adulthood.

Lead author, MCRI researcher Elizabeth Spry said there is an opportunity to identify and support men with pre-existing mental health issues before they become fathers.

"Dads' mental health problems are common and distressing for both men and their families. Knowing who is most likely to experience mental health problems in the transition to parenthood will help us to provide support and treatment for those who need it the most," Elizabeth said.

Emotional problems during a partner's pregnancy also tend to continue after the birth of the child, which can affect the baby, the mother, and the father's ability to care for their child. As these babies grow up, they can also become at risk of emotional and behavioural [problems](#).

Senior author, MCRI Population Health Group Leader Professor George Patton said this study offers the opportunity to achieve a 'triple dividend'.

"Health services are doing much more for women before and during pregnancy; we should be also considering the mental health of men before and during a partner's [pregnancy](#)."

Provided by Murdoch Children's Research Institute

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