

# Maternal depression and natural disaster-related stress may affect infants' temperament

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A new *Infant Mental Health Journal* study demonstrates that prenatal maternal depression has important consequences for infant

temperament. Furthermore, the negative impact of prenatal maternal depression appeared to be magnified when pregnant women lived through Superstorm Sandy.

The study analyzed data on 310 mother-child dyads, with 64 percent of women being pregnant prior to Sandy and 36 percent being pregnant during Sandy. Compared with other infants, infants born to women with prenatal [depression](#) were more likely to experience greater distress, greater fear, lower smiling and laughter, lower high- and low-pleasure seeking, lower soothability, slower falling reactivity, lower cuddliness, and greater sadness at six months of age. These effects were amplified when women were pregnant during Superstorm Sandy.

"The fetal period is one of the most critical periods for neurodevelopment. Prenatal stress, especially during this critical period of fetal development, may render the developing brain more vulnerable to additional stressors such as maternal depression," said lead author Dr. Yoko Nomura, of Queens College, the Advanced Research Science Center at The Graduate Center, CUNY and Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. "Natural disasters may increase in frequency and magnitude, but we can attempt to alleviate the [negative impacts](#) on offspring if we identify high risk pregnant mothers with depression and offer them interventions to make them more resilient."

**More information:** Yoko Nomura et al, Influence of in utero exposure to maternal depression and natural disaster-related stress on infant temperament at 6 months: The children of Superstorm Sandy, *Infant Mental Health Journal* (2019). [DOI: 10.1002/imhj.21766](https://doi.org/10.1002/imhj.21766)

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