

One in four U.K. children have a mother with mental illness

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One in four U.K. children between the ages of 0 and 16 have a mother with a mental illness, according to a team of University of Manchester researchers

Also according to the study published in *The Lancet Public Health*, just over a half of U.K. [children](#) will have had a mother who has experienced mental [illness](#) by the age of 16.

The study also revealed significant regional variation: it estimated the proportion of children with a mother with a mental illness was highest in Northern Ireland at 29.8 percent.

The other highest regions were estimated to be Scotland (26.0 percent), the East Midlands (25.4 percent), the South West (25.3 percent), and the North West of England (25.1 percent). It was lowest in London (16.8 percent) and the south east of England (21.2 percent).

The areas of the U.K. with the highest prevalence of maternal mental illness coincide with areas with the highest levels of deprivation and adult mental illness in general, as shown by previous research.

Children born into poverty, or who are offspring of teenage mothers, were most likely to be exposed to maternal mental illness.

The study examined children aged 0–16 years born between Jan 1, 1991, and Dec 31, 2015, registered on the primary care Clinical Practice Research Datalink between 2005 and 2017.

They identified 783,710 children registered in the U.K. CPRD mother-baby link database, and included 547,747 children and 381 685 mothers in their analysis.

Study author Dr. Matthias Pierce from The University of Manchester said: "As well as the consequences of having a mother suffering from [mental health problems](#), these children face a number of adversities, including living in poverty and having a teenage parent.

"While many of these children are very resilient, these children are more likely to suffer from a range of negative life outcomes, including poorer physical and [mental health](#), lower educational attainment and reduced quality of life."

The study also revealed that the number of children exposed to maternal mental illness increased substantially between 2005 and 2017.

The number of children of mothers with depression or anxiety increased from 22.2 percent between 2005 and 2007 to 25.1 percent between 2015 and 2017.

Although serious [mental illness](#) is rare, the number of children exposed to mothers treated for psychosis increased substantially, as did the numbers of children exposed to [mothers](#) with personality disorders.

Professor Kathryn Abel, from The University of Manchester said: "Our work is not about stigmatizing women suffering from mental health problems, but about recognizing the number and needs of these children.

"This study highlights how reliable, detailed information provides vital information for researchers, policy makers, clinical commissioners, and education and health service providers.

"Appropriate and timely diversion of funds to areas of greatest need is now required to make funding of health care and health research more representative of disease burden across the country."

More information: Kathryn M Abel et al. Prevalence of maternal mental illness among children and adolescents in the UK between 2005 and 2017: a national retrospective cohort analysis, *The Lancet Public Health* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/S2468-2667\(19\)30059-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(19)30059-3)

Provided by University of Manchester

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