

Depression in new fathers connected to relationship insecurities

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Becoming a parent often brings great joy, but not always. Parenthood also entails challenges, stress and, for some people, it can trigger depression. A new study from Lund University in Sweden shows that

male postnatal depression is more common in men who are insecure in their relationship with their partner.

Depression affects around 10-12 per cent of new mothers, and at least 8 per cent of new fathers. The figures are even higher when looking at [depressive symptoms](#); as many as one in five new fathers experience troublesome symptoms, according to the new study conducted by Elia Psouni, registered psychologist and associate professor of psychology at Lund University in Sweden, and Anna Eichbichler, clinical psychologist.

The study focused on reasons behind the fathers' depressive symptoms. Affected men often have a negative view of themselves and are worried about being inadequate in their intimate relationships; a concern that may be based on [childhood experiences](#) with their own [parents](#).

"Having a negative view of oneself, one's own characteristics and abilities, while valuing other people highly often leads to a constant worry about not being good enough, about disappointing others and—potentially—losing them," says Elia Psouni.

The study also attempted to determine what specific aspect of low self-esteem in [intimate relationships](#) triggered the depression. Is it a question of [relationship](#) difficulties in general, or stress about not being good enough as a parent? The answers showed it was the latter.

"Low self-confidence in close relationships seems to trigger parental stress, which in turn triggers the symptoms of depression," says Psouni.

This is the second study in which Psouni and her colleagues show that over one in five fathers of children aged 1-18 months experience debilitating symptoms of depression. The study also revealed that men whose female partners suffered from postpartum [depression](#) were over-represented, and that very few of them were in contact with a

professional to get help.

"The study shows beyond doubt that parents affect one another and reveals the importance of monitoring how parents in various relationships and family constellations manage and fare over a long period," says Psouni.

She and her colleagues are now conducting a longitudinal project that will monitor families over time to generate knowledge about the wellbeing and development of children and parents in various family constellations.

More information: Elia Psouni et al, Feelings of restriction and incompetence in parenting mediate the link between attachment anxiety and paternal postnatal depression., *Psychology of Men & Masculinities* (2019). [DOI: 10.1037/men0000233](https://doi.org/10.1037/men0000233)

Provided by Lund University

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