

Online talking therapy can help mothers with postpartum depression

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A one-day online therapy session can help treat postpartum depression (PPD), says a study led by McMaster University scientists.

Researchers ran the online workshops for 403 [mothers](#) with PPD between April and October last year, at the height of the pandemic. The research findings were published in *JAMA Psychiatry*.

Lead author Ryan Van Lieshout said that 20 per cent of all mothers suffer from PPD, but just one in ten receive evidence-based treatment.

"We found that the workshops led to clinically significant reductions in PPD and anxiety, as well as improvements in [social support](#), mother-infant relations, and infant temperament," said Van Lieshout, associate professor at McMaster's Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences.

"Women who participated in the [workshop](#) were four times more likely to experience a clinically meaningful improvement in PPD than those randomized to the control group. One in three mothers were affected by [postpartum depression](#) during the pandemic, and this is the first time that anyone has shown that it can be treated online over a single day."

The workshops took place live through Zoom and included group exercises, role plays and modules on the causes of PPD, identifying and changing difficult thinking patterns, and strategies to help shift behaviors to improve mood and anxiety.

Van Lieshout said the online therapy sessions could help reduce barriers to treatment including travel time, costs and risk of COVID-19 exposure for both mothers and babies. Mothers can also refer themselves for sessions instead of relying on their doctors.

While most mothers would benefit from just a one-day therapy session, Van Lieshout said the workshops can also help identify those in need of more extensive assistance for their condition. Such an approach will allow [health authorities](#) to implement a 'stepped care' approach to PPD

that can treat patients more efficiently and effectively.

Van Lieshout said the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) has already provided funding for more one-day workshops to be run by public health nurses.

"We're hopeful that [policy makers](#) will take note and consider how this could play an important role in stepped models of care for PPD," said Van Lieshout.

He said that if left untreated in mothers, PPD can increase the risk of their children developing emotional and behavioral problems.

More information: Ryan J. Van Lieshout et al, Effect of Online 1-Day Cognitive Behavioral Therapy–Based Workshops Plus Usual Care vs Usual Care Alone for Postpartum Depression, *JAMA Psychiatry* (2021). [DOI: 10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2021.2488](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2021.2488)

Provided by McMaster University

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