

Landmark study links post-natal depression and low income

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A longitudinal study of Queensland families has found women on lower incomes are more likely to suffer with pre and post-natal depression.

AN analysis of the Queensland Family Cohort (QFC) pilot project data, conducted by the University of Queensland's Professor Brenda Gannon, found women diagnosed with depression before and shortly after giving birth earned on average \$417 less per week than their counterparts.

It also revealed 23 percent more likely to come from non-white backgrounds.

Professor Gannon's study assessed the economic circumstances of 450 families participating in the trial at Brisbane's Mater Mothers' Hospital.

"We specifically discussed data indicating the inequality of economic opportunity between populations in terms of mental [health](#) and utilization of scarce healthcare resources," Professor Gannon said.

"It is well known in health economics literature that early life opportunities, before a child is born, can affect the child's health and their use of health services.

"What is less well known is the extent which social and [economic opportunities](#) are related to mental health of the mother and the mother's use of health services before and after birth."

As well as disparities in income, mothers with depression were more likely to be single (one in ten) and 24 percent less likely to have private health insurance.

"This study will help us identify immediate and future health care requirements for the population, by providing information on these vulnerable groups," Professor Gannon said.

QFC researchers are expanding the pilot into a much larger three decade [longitudinal study](#) of 12,500 families across Queensland.

QFC Principal Investigator, Professor Vicki Clifton from Mater Research, says women and their partners have been recruited since 2018.

"Mothers and their partners complete questionnaires about things like education, employment, housing, health, intentions to breastfeed, history of pregnancy, and sleep patterns," Professor Clifton said.

Mothers also receive face-to-face visits with a midwife at 24, 28 and 36 weeks' gestation, while in hospital and again six weeks after giving birth.

Professor Clifton said similar studies have been developed across the world, which means data will be able to be compared, allowing for specific cultures, such as First Nations people.

"The most important aspect is to understand the current health of families and their future health needs.

"This work will contribute to improving the design of future health service requirements," Professor Clifton said.

Provided by University of Queensland

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