

Birth-related PTSD is overlooked in Australia, says study

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Research by University of Sydney psychologists examining post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among Australian mothers shows that about a third of women experience a traumatic birth. Of these women,

one in eight had symptoms of post traumatic stress.

However, the vast majority of women who display symptoms of birth-related PTSD remain undiagnosed in health care settings.

The research, published in the *Journal of Affective Disorders*, is led by Alysha-leigh Fameli, a registered psychologist and Ph.D. candidate at the University of Sydney's School of Psychology in the Faculty of Science. She is also a member of the Brain and Mind Center.

"In Australia, routine antenatal health care and screening around [mental health](#) is quite narrow. It really only looks at antenatal and postnatal depression, with some mentions of anxiety," Fameli said.

"We really don't acknowledge other forms of postpartum psychopathology or mental health struggles.

"No one is screening for birth-related PTSD; it's strangely overlooked."

The research indicates women who experience traumatic births may report difficulties bonding with their infants, strained relationships with their partners and reluctance to have more children.

Fameli gleaned a snapshot of PTSD among Australian mothers using a new tool known as the City Birth Trauma Scale. The tool involves asking mothers 29 questions that allow clinicians and researchers to measure PTSD in women who experience trauma in childbirth.

Her message to clinicians is clear: adopting the tool is an easy way to identify PTSD that would likely otherwise go unnoticed and untreated.

"We could begin to address the PTSD issue in Australia by implementing the City Birth Trauma Scale in [healthcare settings](#),"

Fameli said.

"It offers a really easy-to-interpret and administer solution to assess and measure childbirth-related PTSD symptoms, both antenatally and in the postpartum periods."

Fameli said using the City Birth Trauma Scale in clinical settings would ensure healthcare providers are referring women to appropriate services where they can receive suitable support, benefiting mothers, children and partners.

"We know the first 2,000 days of an infant's life are the most crucial for [brain development](#), and a mother's well-being is a huge predictor of that," Fameli said.

"If we invest more into mums and babies and perinatal mental health, we are going to be investing in future generations.

"About 4% of all mothers in Australia may meet the criteria for PTSD caused by their birth experience."

Fameli is currently recruiting participants for a second trial on [birth](#)-related PTSD. She is looking for mothers with babies younger than six months of age who can take part in a clinical interview and an observation of mum-baby interactions. Visit the study [website](#) for more information.

More information: Alysha-leigh Fameli et al, Assessment of childbirth-related post traumatic stress disorder in Australian mothers: Psychometric properties of the City Birth Trauma Scale, *Journal of Affective Disorders* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jad.2022.12.123](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2022.12.123)

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