

Mums of preschoolers still struggling with depression

Clinicians at Tweddle are not surprised by a recent Murdoch Children's Research Institute study of 1500 mothers that found 10 per cent of women reported symptoms of depression a year after the birth of their first child but this increased to 15 per cent four years after the birth. Maternal depression is more common four years after the birth of a first child than at any time in the first 12 months postpartum, according to new research by Murdoch Children's Research Institute.

Tweddle Psychologist Nikki Zerman said that "Tweddle plays an important role in providing support to parents with children up to school age. Often services (such as mother baby units) exclude parents once the child is 12 months. Factors such as isolation, financial concerns, expectations of what parenting would be like and relationship issues do not disappear once a child is past a certain age. We frequently see mums and dads in our service who have children at preschool age."

Researchers found almost one in three women reported depressive symptoms at some stage in the first four years after birth. Women who had experienced depression in early pregnancy or during the first 12 months postpartum were more likely to report depression when their first child was four years of age. However, 40 per cent of women reporting depressive symptoms when their first child was four had not previously reported depressive symptoms.

Women with one child at the four year follow up had a more than two-fold increase in risk of reporting depressive symptoms, compared to women with two or more children. A/Professor Stephanie Brown, who leads the study, said this is partly explained by greater levels of social adversity among women with only one child.

Lead author, Dr Hannah Woolhouse said counter to the prevailing view that the perinatal period is a peak time of vulnerability to depression, the prevalence of depression was higher at four years postpartum than any point in the first 12 months after birth. Researchers said based on the findings, it is likely that current systems of maternal mental health surveillance will miss over half the women experiencing depression in the early years of parenting.

Jacque O'Brien, Tweddle CEO agreed with A/Professor's assessment that there needed to be greater attention given to the emotional wellbeing of women with pre-school age children, and better targeting of resources to women at higher risk of mental health issues.

"Tweddle's intake and assessment team take a significant amount of calls from families with older children presenting with huge challenges, including maternal depression" We're fortunate to have psychologists, social workers and maternal and child health nurses with the expertise and experience to help mums beyond the baby stage. This research shows an increase in mental health concerns for these mums which we know can have long term impacts on a child's outcomes" The importance of having the experience to work with both the mother and the child in the same setting with experienced perinatal clinicians is underscored by this research"

For media enquiries, please call
Kerrie Gottliebsen, Tweddle Communications Manager
03 8387 0623 or 0412 145 070 or email
kerrie.gottliebsen@tweddle.org.au