

For immediate release

CHILD Study finds maternal depression higher among certain ethnic minorities

HAMILTON, ON (7 August 2018)

Mothers who are Black or of First Nations ethnicity have a higher risk for depressive symptoms and stress than mothers of other ethnicities while pregnant and until their children reach pre-school age, according to new findings from the CHILD Study.

“We know that mothers from ethnic minorities in Canada have a higher risk for psychosocial distress than White mothers during their children’s first five years of life,” says Dr. Padmaja Subbarao, a staff respirologist at The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids) and an associate professor in the Departments of Paediatrics and Physiology at the University of Toronto.

“Our study showed that this pattern is more nuanced than previously thought; not all ethnic minority mothers experienced higher distress than White mothers. We found that First Nations and, to a lesser extent, Black mothers were the most at risk.”

The research was published online this week in the [*Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*](#).

Dr. Subbarao is Director of AllerGen’s CHILD Study—a national birth cohort study collecting a wide range of health, lifestyle, genetic and environmental exposure information from 3,500 children and their families from pregnancy to school age and beyond.

She and her team analyzed data from more than 3,000 mothers participating in the CHILD Study. Mothers completed detailed questionnaires about their distress levels throughout their pregnancy and until their children were five years of age. Mothers self-identified their ethnicity as White Caucasian, First Nations, Black, Southeast Asian, East Asian, South Asian, Middle Eastern, Hispanic or mixed ethnicity.

Among all mothers, stress levels were highest during pregnancy, decreased after the birth of the baby, and increased again after the child reached the age of one or two years.

“Black and First Nations mothers consistently reported the highest stress levels compared to all other ethnicities,” says AllerGen trainee and study first-author Christoffer Dharma, a research associate at McMaster University. “This difference was significant, even after we controlled for other factors that may affect stress, such as social support, a history of depression, and socioeconomic status.”

Although self-reported depressive symptoms may not always translate to clinical depression, it is important for family, friends and healthcare professionals to be aware of potential problems and to support a mother's psychological wellbeing both during and after pregnancy, notes Dr. Subbarao.

"With ethnic diversity in Canada increasing, it's vital that we address ethnically based differences in health risk, so that we can develop appropriate community programs and public health policies to ensure effective intervention strategies," she adds.

About the CHILD Study and AllerGen NCE

Funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and the Allergy, Genes and Environment (AllerGen) Network, the [CHILD Study](#) is collecting a vast range of health, lifestyle and environmental exposure information from 3,500 mothers and children from pregnancy to age five years and beyond. The study spans four provinces (BC, AB, MB and ON), involving over 140 multidisciplinary researchers, students and research staff. St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton hosts the CHILD Study's National Coordinating Centre.

[AllerGen NCE Inc.](#) is a national research network dedicated to improving the quality of life of people suffering from allergic and related immune diseases. Funded by Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada through the federal Networks of Centres of Excellence (NCE) Program, the Network is hosted at McMaster University in Hamilton, ON.

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