

## Research You Can Use

### Maternal Postpartum Depression and Paternal Involvement

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Mezulis, A. H., Hyde, J. S., & Clark, R. (2004). Father involvement moderates the effect of maternal depression during a child's infancy on child behavior problems in kindergarten. *Journal of Family Psychology, 18(4)*, 575-588.

Postpartum depression has garnered a great deal of public attention in the last few years and the negative impact of maternal depression on a baby's development has been widely reported. For example, studies have found that babies of depressed mothers often display more negative emotions and poor cognitive development. Maternal depression during infancy has also been found to predict the occurrence of externalizing behavior problems, like acting out, and internalizing problems, like withdrawal or depression, when these children are in kindergarten.

While much of the focus has been on the impact postpartum depression has on the mother-child relationship, it is also important to consider how the father can impact the baby's healthy development in the absence of the normal mother-child bond. This study assessed the impact of paternal involvement during the infancy of a child with a mother suffering from postpartum depression.

Increased paternal involvement with children has been associated with fewer behavioral problems and better academic performance. Fathers who exhibit parenting style characterized by high levels of warmth and high levels of control have been found to lead to positive outcomes for children, including fewer behavior problems.

Paternal depression in addition to maternal depression during the child's infancy was associated with the most internalizing behaviors in kindergarten. However, absence of paternal depression, on the other hand, had little impact on the children's internalizing behaviors when the mother was depressed.

It appears that fathers cannot completely fulfill the void left when a mother is unable to form normal attachments with her newborn. However, fathers do play an important role in the development of their children. This study suggests that fathers may provide the discipline and structure during infancy that are necessary to prevent children from having behavioral problems later on. Thus, while they cannot replace the mother-child relationship, they do have their own unique role to play in the development of a healthy and well-adjusted child.

**Take-home message:** When a mother is suffering from postpartum depression, it is critical to the child's healthy development that the father spends time with his infant.

Article submitted by Carl Marrone, CMC '06.

*Research You Can Use* is a translation of selected research on topics related to the intersection of work, family, and children. The research articles were selected by students in the Psychology of Work, Family, and Children class (Psyc 116) in fall 2005. The information in the research articles were rewritten into plain language by student research assistants at the Berger Institute. The Berger Institute also has a brief listing of exemplary research that supports our conclusions about best practices for public policies, employers, communities, and working families. We invite you to log on for more information: <http://berger.cmc.edu>. *This was published in the Berger Institute newsletter, Spring 2006, vol. 6.*

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