

The role of mindfulness and emotional regulation in predicting maternal depression. A longitudinal birth cohort study.

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Background and objectives: There is growing research interest in the importance of mindfulness and emotional regulation in parenting. This is subsequent to well-established evidence regarding the negative impact of maternal depression on maternal sensitivity (Bernard, 2018). The Illawarra Born Cross-generation birth cohort study has followed mothers from pregnancy investigating the role of mindfulness in mother - infant interaction. Previously prenatal levels of the mindfulness subscale “acting with awareness” has been associated with maternal response to infant distress at two and six months postpartum, supporting the importance of current moment awareness in attuned maternal responding (Pickard, Townsend, Caputi, & Grenyer, 2018) (Pickard, Townsend, Caputi, & Grenyer, 2017). The current study further explores the relationship between prenatal mindfulness and emotional regulation on maternal mental health twelve months post-partum to investigate the two constructs as potential predictors of maternal depression. Method: Twenty-nine females completed the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) (Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006) and Difficulties in Emotional Regulation Scale (DERS) (Grazt & Roemer, 2004) at 30 weeks gestation. The Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS 21) (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) was collected to measure maternal mental health at 12 months postpartum. Results: Spearman correlations revealed a positive relationship between the DERS subscale: *Difficulties engaging in Goal-directed behaviour* with depression and stress $r = .48, p < .001$ and $.47, p < .001$, respectively, whereas the subscale: *Impulse control difficulties* was related to post-partum stress, $r = .45, p < .05$. The FFMQ subscale *Acting with awareness* was also negatively associated with postpartum levels of depression and stress, $r = -.42, p < .05$ and $r = -.38, p < .05$, respectively. A mediation analysis was conducted to explore emotional regulation as a potential mediator between mindfulness and depression however the results were non-significant. Discussion: The current study supported the predicted role of mindfulness and emotional regulation prenatally in maternal mental health postpartum, reinforcing the role of clinical interventions including both mindfulness practice and emotional regulation skills for at risk groups.

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