# Impacts of Maternal Mental Health on Child Development and Neonatal Care: A Narrative Review

## Impactos da Saúde Mental Materna no Desenvolvimento Infantil e nos Cuidados Neonatais: Uma Revisão Narrativa

## Impactos de la Salud Mental Materna en el Desarrollo Infantil y en los Cuidados Neonatales: Una Revisión Narrativa

**RESUMO**

A saúde mental materna constitui um componente determinante para o bem-estar da mulher, a qualidade do vínculo mãe-bebê e o desenvolvimento infantil. Durante o ciclo gravídico-puerperal, transformações hormonais, emocionais e sociais podem desencadear desequilíbrios psíquicos, entre os quais a depressão pós-parto, a ansiedade gestacional e o estresse materno. Este estudo tem como objetivo analisar, por meio de uma revisão narrativa, as evidências científicas acerca dos impactos dos transtornos mentais maternos sobre o cuidado neonatal e o desenvolvimento infantil, destacando fatores de risco e estratégias protetivas. A busca bibliográfica foi realizada em bases nacionais e internacionais (SciELO, LILACS, PubMed e Google Scholar), contemplando publicações de 2015 a 2025. As evidências indicam que fatores biopsicossociais, como vulnerabilidade socioeconômica, baixa escolaridade, violência doméstica, ausência de suporte familiar e histórico de sofrimento psíquico, elevam o risco de transtornos mentais durante a gestação e o puerpério, repercutindo negativamente no desenvolvimento cognitivo, emocional e comportamental da criança. Em contrapartida, a presença de redes de apoio, o fortalecimento do vínculo materno-fetal e a inclusão do pré-natal psicológico demonstram efeitos protetivos, promovendo maior segurança emocional e vínculos afetivos saudáveis. Conclui-se que a saúde mental materna deve ser reconhecida como eixo prioritário das políticas públicas e das práticas interdisciplinares em saúde coletiva, demandando integração entre atenção obstétrica, pediátrica e psicológica para garantir um cuidado integral e equitativo à díade mãe-bebê.

**DESCRITORES:** Saúde Mental Materna; Desenvolvimento Infantil; Cuidado do Lactente; Depressão Pós-Parto; Relações Mãe-Filho.

**ABSTRACT**

Maternal mental health is a key determinant of women's well-being, the quality of the mother–infant bond, and child development. Throughout the pregnancy–puerperal cycle, hormonal, emotional, and social transformations can trigger psychological imbalances such as postpartum depression, gestational anxiety, and maternal stress. This study aims to analyze, through a narrative review, scientific evidence on the impacts of maternal mental disorders on neonatal care and child development, emphasizing risk factors and protective strategies. The literature search was conducted in national and international databases (SciELO, LILACS, PubMed, and Google Scholar), covering publications from 2015 to 2025. Evidence indicates that biopsychosocial factors — such as socioeconomic vulnerability, low educational level, domestic violence, lack of family support, and a history of psychological distress — increase the risk of mental disorders during pregnancy and the postpartum period, negatively affecting the child's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral development. Conversely, the presence of support networks, the strengthening of the maternal–fetal bond, and the inclusion of psychological prenatal care have shown protective effects, promoting greater emotional security and healthy affective bonds. It is concluded that maternal mental health should be recognized as a priority axis in public policies and interdisciplinary practices in public health, requiring integration between obstetric, pediatric, and psychological care to ensure comprehensive and equitable attention to the mother–infant dyad.

**DESCRIPTORS:** Maternal Mental Health; Child Development; Infant Care; Postpartum Depression; Mother-Child Relations.

**RESUMEN**

La salud mental materna constituye un componente determinante para el bienestar de la mujer, la calidad del vínculo madre–bebé y el desarrollo infantil. Durante el ciclo gestacional y puerperal, las transformaciones hormonales, emocionales y sociales pueden desencadenar desequilibrios psíquicos, entre ellos la depresión posparto, la ansiedad gestacional y el estrés materno. Este estudio tiene como objetivo analizar, mediante una revisión narrativa, la evidencia científica sobre los impactos de los trastornos mentales maternos en el cuidado neonatal y el desarrollo infantil, destacando los factores de riesgo y las estrategias de protección. La búsqueda bibliográfica se realizó en bases de datos nacionales e internacionales (SciELO, LILACS, PubMed y Google Scholar), incluyendo publicaciones de 2015 a 2025. Las evidencias muestran que factores biopsicosociales —como la vulnerabilidad socioeconómica, el bajo nivel educativo, la violencia doméstica, la ausencia de apoyo familiar y los antecedentes de sufrimiento psíquico— aumentan el riesgo de trastornos mentales durante el embarazo y el puerperio, repercutiendo negativamente en el desarrollo cognitivo, emocional y conductual del niño. En contraposición, la presencia de redes de apoyo, el fortalecimiento del vínculo materno–fetal y la inclusión del acompañamiento psicológico prenatal demuestran efectos protectores, favoreciendo una mayor seguridad emocional y vínculos afectivos saludables. Se concluye que la salud mental materna debe reconocerse como un eje prioritario de las políticas públicas y de las prácticas interdisciplinares en salud colectiva, requiriendo la integración entre la atención obstétrica, pediátrica y psicológica para garantizar un cuidado integral y equitativo a la díada madre–bebé.

**DESCRIPTORES:** Salud Mental Materna; Desarrollo Infantil; Cuidado del Lactante; Depresión Posparto; Relaciones Madre-Hijo.


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## INTRODUCTION

Maternal mental health has become an essential field for a comprehensive understanding of perinatal care and child development. Disorders such as postpartum depression, gestational anxiety, and maternal stress are increasingly recognized as risk factors not only for the mother's well-being but also for the emotional bond, neonatal care, and physical, emotional, and cognitive development of the child in the first years of life[1,2].

During the pregnancy-puerperal cycle, women experience intense hormonal, physical, and emotional changes that can trigger psychological imbalances, especially when associated with factors such as lack of social support, history of trauma, low education, and socioeconomic vulnerability[3]. When not diagnosed early, these disorders directly affect the mother-child bond, the mother's engagement with neonatal care, and, in the long term, can have adverse impacts on the child's development, such as behavioral changes, learning difficulties, and emotional instability [2,4].

The maternal-fetal bond, which is established during pregnancy, plays a central role in this process. Studies indicate that reduced levels of attachment are associated with depressive symptoms and fragile emotional conditions, which can compromise maternal responsiveness in the postpartum period1. In addition, the role of psychology professionals in prenatal care has been identified as strategic in promoting maternal mental health, especially by enabling qualified listening, strengthening bonds, and early identification of signs of psychological distress[3].

Despite the growing body of scientific research on the subject, there are still challenges in implementing public policies that effectively integrate maternal mental health into obstetric and neonatal care, especially in vulnerable contexts. In this sense, understanding how the mother's emotional health affects newborn care and child development is essential to support interdisciplinary family-centered care practices. Given this, the present study aims to analyze the impacts of maternal mental health on child development and neonatal care, in light of scientific evidence, through a narrative review.

## DEVELOPMENT

This is a narrative review of the literature, whose objective is to gather, describe, and critically analyze scientific evidence related to the impacts of maternal mental health on child development and neonatal care. This methodological approach allows for a broader and more interpretive understanding of the topic, without the need for systematic search protocols or meta-analysis criteria.

The articles were selected between August and September 2025 from the SciELO, LILACS, PubMed, and Google Scholar electronic databases. The descriptors used were: "maternal mental health," "child development," "neonatal care," "postpartum depression," and "mother-baby bond," combined using the Boolean operators "AND" and "OR" in Portuguese and English.

Articles published in the last ten years (2015-2025) were included, available in full text, focusing on pregnancy, puerperium, women's mental health, infant neuropsychomotor development, and newborn care. Duplicate studies, event abstracts, systematic reviews, and articles focusing exclusively on severe mental disorders or outside the perinatal period were excluded. The analysis of the selected articles was conducted interpretively, considering the relevance of the content, the objectives of the studies, and the contributions to clinical practice and public policies in maternal and child health.

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Maternal mental health during pregnancy and the postpartum period has become a fundamental axis of public health, not only because of its impact on women's well-being, but also because of its direct repercussions on child development. It is estimated that one in four women experience some form of mental disorder during this period, with depression and anxiety being the most prevalent[1,2,3,4].

Several biopsychosocial factors, such as poverty, low educational attainment, domestic violence, and lack of social support, increase the risk of psychological distress in motherhood[4,5,6,7]. These conditions have an impact on the experience of pregnancy and also on the quality of the bond established with the baby, which is considered essential for the child's psycho-emotional development[4,5,6,7].

Maternal depression, especially when persistent, is associated with poorer indicators of child mental health. The MINA-Brazil cohort study found that mothers with chronic depressive symptoms had children who were up to three times more likely to develop emotional and behavioral problems at age five[5]. Recent reviews also confirm that postpartum depression compromises the child's cognitive, emotional, and social development, in addition to affecting the quality of mother-baby interaction[4,5,6,7].

In addition to individual effects, maternal mental health directly influences parenting practices and family relationships. Children exposed to mothers with depressive or anxious symptoms have more behavioral problems, which can manifest themselves in externalizing (aggression, disobedience) or internalizing (anxiety, withdrawal) ways[8]. These conditions tend to be aggravated in families with low levels of emotional cohesion and negative educational practices [4,5,6,7].

Another key aspect is maternal-fetal attachment (MFA), which begins during pregnancy. Reduced levels of MAF are associated with depressive symptoms, absence of a partner, and lack of family support, which can compromise the postnatal bond and maternal responsiveness[4,5,6,7]. This weakening has repercussions on neonatal care and the child's socio-emotional development[11].

In this scenario, psychological prenatal care emerges as an essential preventive strategy. By offering emotional support, promoting adaptation to the changes of pregnancy, and strengthening the support network, this practice contributes to reducing anxiety, preventing postpartum depression, and stimulating a healthier bond between mother and baby[4,5,6,7]. The role of the psychologist in this process is fundamental in identifying early signs of psychological distress and assisting the pregnant woman in building parenthood[4,5,6,7].

Finally, the impacts of maternal mental health go beyond the individual sphere, reflecting structural inequalities. Social inequality, marked by poor living conditions and socioeconomic exclusion, increases the risk of maternal psychological distress and compromises children's development[4,5,6,7]. Thus, integrated public policies that coordinate obstetric, pediatric, and psychological care are essential to promote comprehensive care and reduce inequalities in the field of maternal and child health[4,5,6,7].

Therefore, child development is also strongly influenced by the physical, social, and emotional environments in which the child lives. Evidence shows that the absence of emotional security compromises communication, socialization, and attention skills, in addition to increasing the risk of aggression, hyperactivity, and affective disorders. In contrast, welcoming and cohesive family environments favor linguistic and behavioral development, reinforcing the importance of positive interactions in early childhood[7,8]. The socioeconomic context is also a determining factor, since families of lower status have worse neurodevelopmental indicators due to limited essential resources[7,8].

In this sense, the presence of support networks in the postpartum period emerges as an essential protective factor for maternal mental health. Recent research indicates that family, social, institutional, and community support significantly reduces the risks of depression, anxiety, and other mental disorders in the postpartum period, while its absence is associated with an increase in negative emotional symptoms and a weakening of the mother-baby bond[15]. In addition, the support offered by health professionals and humanized public policies increases mothers' ability to cope with the demands of maternal care, promoting psychological well-being and strengthening mother-child interaction[7,8].

These findings reinforce that the impact of maternal mental health transcends individual care, extending to the health and development of the child. Thus, both the strengthening of support networks and the creation of favorable environments are complementary strategies that should be integrated into public policies aimed at promoting maternal and child health.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Maternal mental health is of great importance not only for the mother's well-being, but also for the child's development and the quality of family bonds. When mothers receive emotional, social, and professional support, they feel better prepared to cope with the changes of pregnancy and postpartum, which favors baby care.

On the other hand, the absence of support and the presence of vul-


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nerability factors, such as poverty, violence, or lack of adequate monitoring, increase the risk of emotional problems for both the mother and the child. This can compromise child development in different aspects, such as behavior, cognition, and social life.

Therefore, investing in public policies, prenatal psychological support, and strengthening support networks is essential. This makes it possible to promote comprehensive care that benefits the mother, baby, and family, preventing negative impacts in the future and ensuring a healthier and more welcoming start in life for the child.

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