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## Mini Review

# The intergenerational effect of mother's depression on their young adult children's depression

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## Background and purpose

Women are often more likely to report mental health problems such as depression compared to men [1,2]. As individuals age, people with children are more likely to be depressed [3]. Therefore, mothers are at particularly high risk for depression, and their depression negatively influences their children's development [4,5]. Even though it is important to take into account the effect of mother's depression on their children's psychological health, empirical evidence about the intergenerational effects of depression at three points in time does not exist. Thus, this study explores the relationships between mother's depression in young adulthood and late adulthood and their children's depression. Specific research questions included: 1) do demographics, including socioeconomic status, influence mother's depression in young and late adulthood?; 2) does mother's depression in young adulthood affect depression in late adulthood?; and 3) are there relationships between mother's depression in young and late adulthood and their children's depression?.

## Methods

The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 79 (NLSY 79) and the NLSY 79 for Children and Young Adults were used for analyses. A unique identification code was used to pair the mothers and their children. 4,109 dyads were selected for the final sample. 1,937 White, 1,319 Black and 853 Hispanic dyads were selected. The Center for Epidemiologic Studies-Depression (CES-D) was used to measure both mother's and

children's depression. Age, education, marital status, cognitive ability, urban/rural region, poverty status, and employment were included as control variables. Multiple linear regression was conducted to answer the research questions.

## Result

Black mothers were at lower risk of depression in young adulthood compared to White mother's. Mother's with higher education and married mothers were less likely to be at risk of depression in young adulthood. Lower cognitive abilities, poverty and unemployment were also related to mother's depression in young adulthood. In late adulthood, married mother's were less likely to be depressed. Mothers in poverty and living in rural regions were at greater risk of depression in late adulthood as well.

When examining their children's depression, children with unmarried mother's and children with mothers in poverty were more likely to be depressed. Regarding intergenerational depression, mother's depression in young and late adulthood was related to their children's depression. Mother's depression in young adulthood was also related to mother's likelihood to be depressed in late adulthood.

## Implications

Racial and ethnic differences in mothers' depression suggest that more mental health services targeting depression should be provided to White mothers, as this study found that White mothers were at a higher risk for depression than Black



mothers. Given that mother's depression in young adulthood were related to increased depression in late adulthood, mental health services or programs for women's depression should be targeted during or before the young adult years. Providing more services to decrease mother's economic challenges is critical to reduce children's depression. To improve inequality in the intergenerational transmission of depression between mothers and their children, tailored mental health services for mothers should be widely available and easily accessible.

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