



VILLAGEHOOD
AUSTRALIA

MATERNAL MENTAL HEALTH

What You Need to Know

Villagehood Australia is a registered charity that provides peer and professional support for mothers and children during the early years. We have prepared this brochure to raise awareness and break the silence surrounding maternal mental health (MMH).

By sharing information about the signs and symptoms of various MMH disorders, we seek to inform and empower the community to better support the health and wellbeing of mothers. It is crucial to recognise that MMH not only impacts the mental wellbeing of pregnant and postpartum women but also has significant implications for the overall physical and mental development of babies and the wellbeing of the entire family.

Why is this important?

60,000+

women giving birth every year in Australia experience Postnatal Depression within the first two years after birth

21%

of maternal suicide is due to severe depression

Suicide is a **Leading Cause**

of maternal death in the perinatal period*

*from 20 weeks pregnancy to 1 year after birth

Baby blues that lasts for **more than 2 weeks** is **NOT** baby blues and you need to pay attention

Baby Blues

Baby blues is the feeling of a wide range of emotions such as teariness and irritability in a short amount of time. It is normal, does not require medical intervention, and typically lasts up to two weeks postpartum. Approximately 80% of new mothers feel the "baby blues".

Types of Maternal Mental Health Disorders

There are different types of Maternal Mental Health Disorders (MMHD) with varying severity, duration, and treatment, such as depression & anxiety, panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), bipolar disorder, and psychosis.

Depression & Anxiety

One in five mothers will experience postnatal depression within the first two years after birth. Many mothers experience depression and anxiety at the same time. In extreme cases, depression may lead to suicidal ideation. Symptoms may include:

Depression:

- Crying / sadness
- Suicidal thoughts
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Appetite changes
- Irritability / anger

Anxiety:

- Excessive worry or fear
- Restlessness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Irritability / anger
- Fear of harming yourself or the baby

1 in 5



mothers of children aged 24 months or less have been diagnosed with depression

Panic Disorder

Panic Disorder is a type of anxiety disorder characterised by recurrent panic attacks. These attacks manifest psychological and physical symptoms and may significantly impact a mother's daily life.

Symptoms may include:

- Shaking / trembling
- Racing heartbeat / chest pain
- Hot or cold flashes
- Avoidance of going outside

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

PTSD may develop after experiencing a terrifying event such as traumatic birthing experience or hospitalisation of a child.

1 in 10

mothers experience PTSD from the birth of their child

Around one of three mothers experience a traumatising birth of their child in some way. PTSD may further develop in one out of 10 mothers.

Symptoms may include:

- Intrusive unwanted memories of traumatising event
- Avoidance of reminders of event

Perinatal Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

OCD involves intrusive thoughts (obsessions) and repetitive / excessive behaviours (compulsions). The likelihood of OCD rises during the perinatal period and may be displayed by excessive checking on the baby or washing.

Examples of unwanted intrusive thoughts and compulsive behaviours:

Intrusive thoughts:

- Harming the baby
- Baby coming into contact with germs or harmful materials
- Accidentally forgetting the baby

Compulsive behaviours:

- Excessive cleaning
- Hypervigilance
- Repetitive actions / rituals

4-9%

of new mothers are affected by OCD, especially after birth

Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar Disorder is characterised by extreme mood swings that cycle between episodes of mania (elevated mood) and depression (low mood).

1-3%

of women are affected by Bipolar Mood Disorder

Mania:

- High levels of happiness and energy
- Engaging in risky or impulsive behaviours
- Delusion of grandiosity

Depression:

- Crying / sadness
- Low energy / interest
- Suicidal thoughts
- Excessive or little sleep
- Appetite changes
- Irritability / anger

Postpartum Psychosis

This is a mental health emergency and requires immediate help.

Visit an Emergency Department if someone is exhibiting signs of psychosis.

Psychosis is characterised by a person's loss of contact with reality. Mothers may display sudden and drastic changes in behaviour or thinking and may lead to thoughts of harming oneself or the baby. Symptoms may include:

- Broadcasting of thoughts
- Disorganised thoughts
- Hallucinations
- Jealousy
- Paranoia
- Delusion of grandiosity

1 to 2
in 1,000

new mothers are affected by psychosis



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Support Available

If you are feeling triggered or are worried about someone, you may get in touch with a GP, obstetrician, midwife, child health nurse or use the following contacts:

Panda National Helpline

(Mon-Fri, 9AM – 7:30PM)

1300 726 306

Lifeline (available 24/7)

13 11 14

Pregnancy Birth and Baby

(7AM – Midnight)

1800 882 436

Beyond Blue (available 24/7)

1300 22 4636

Suicide Call Back Service

(available 24/7)

1300 659 467

1800Respect (available 24/7)

1800 737 732

Tips to Take Care of Yourself



Make time for yourself every day to relax and engage in activities that bring you joy.



Take care of your physical wellbeing through regular exercise, nourishing meals, and sufficient rest.



Take care of your mental wellbeing by relieving yourself of undue pressure and unrealistic demands.



Take care of your emotional wellbeing by recognising and expressing your emotions, and focusing on positive feelings.



Cultivate your social wellbeing by establishing a support system or seeking out peer support to foster connections.

References

- PANDA, 2023 | The Conversation, 2019
- Centre of Perinatal Excellence, 2023
- Postpartum Support International, 2023
- Motherhood Center of New York City, 2023
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2023

Learn more about our Charity and our Free Programs
www.villagehoodaustralia.com

Villagehood Australia acknowledges the Kurna people past, present, and future, the culture and that they are the traditional custodians of the land we live and work on. We would also like to acknowledge all First Nations people across Australia.

