

# The Association Between Trauma History and Body Image, Depression, Posttraumatic Stress, and Relationship Satisfaction in Postpartum Women

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## INTRODUCTION

- The postpartum period (up to 1 year post delivery) can be a time of significant change and transition
- The relationship between trauma and body image is clear, but this has not been investigated in postpartum women
- Posttraumatic stress symptoms are considered a significant public health concern, but the association between depression and interpersonal concerns has not been thoroughly explored in postpartum women

## OBJECTIVE

To explore the relationship between lifetime experience with trauma (including birth-related and prepregnancy trauma) and body image, posttraumatic stress, depression and relationship satisfaction in women during the first year postpartum

## PROPOSED HYPOTHESES

1. Postpartum women who endorse a history of trauma will report significantly greater body image concerns and depression levels, as well as lower relationship satisfaction compared to postpartum women who do not endorse a history of trauma.
2. In postpartum women with a history of trauma, higher posttraumatic stress symptoms will be associated with greater body image concerns and depression levels, and lower relationship satisfaction.
3. We will descriptively explore levels of body image concerns, depression levels, and relationship satisfaction in postpartum women who endorse a history of sexual trauma.

## PROPOSED METHODS

- Observational, cross-sectional study design
- English speaking adult women (age  $\geq$  18 years) who gave birth in the past year and are currently in an intimate relationship will be eligible to participate in the study
- Recruitment will occur through social media and online forums that focus on topics related to pregnancy and the postpartum period, as well as contacting OBGYN offices
- Screened and eligible participants will be asked to complete:
  - Demographic questionnaire
  - PTSD Checklist for Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-Fifth Edition (PCL-5)
  - Body Attitude Questionnaire (BAQ)
  - Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS)
  - The Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI)
- Survey data will be captured using REDCap and analyzed using t-tests and regression models.

## POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS

- This research has important implications for both medical and therapeutic postpartum care. Specifically, to:
  - Assist with the identification of at-risk women
  - Inform treatment strategies
  - Provide further support for universal screenings during postpartum to identify women at-risk of various perinatal psychosocial concerns
  - Provide empirical support for routine maternal and postpartum care to include trauma-informed strategies

## THEORY

- Cognitive theory can assist in conceptualizing and treating traumatic experiences that lead to problematic symptoms (Ehlers & Clark, 2000)
- Perception of current threat can be due to the following two individual key features:
  - Appraisal of the trauma
  - Memory of the event and its connection to other memories
- Treatment may focus on integration of the trauma memory, modifying sense of threat, and cognitive strategies to increase flexibility

## CONCLUSION

- The postpartum period is time that can present various struggles for women, particularly those who have experienced trauma
- Health care professionals can play a vital role in risk identification and necessary treatment

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