

**For Immediate Release**

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***Report: Treat Mom's Depression so Kids Can Thrive***  
*Shift in Policy-making Urged*

**New York City** – In a brief released this week, researchers at Columbia University's National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) urge America's lawmakers to incorporate maternal depression prevention and intervention when implementing child-focused policy. The brief also says that poverty – more than any other factor – is a strong indicator of maternal depression.

“We need our policymakers to pay much more serious attention to maternal depression – particularly among low-income mothers – as part of the larger efforts across the country to improve healthy developmental and school-readiness outcomes in young children,” says Jane Knitzer, EdD, director of NCCP, a research center at Columbia's Mailman School of Public Health.

Maternal depression is widespread across class and race and has been linked to genetic composition, situational risk factors and circumstances, and environmental gene interaction, explains Knitzer. “Disproportionately, however, depression affects low-income parents whose own lives have involved trauma linked to violence or abuse, and the stress linked to a life of hardship.”

But what makes this so important to address in context of the next generation, she adds, is that maternal depression impairs parenting. Parents of young children with depression are less likely to ensure their children are connected with health care, to manage widespread conditions like asthma, or to provide the kind of consistent nurturing young children need to thrive.

The NCCP brief points to correlations between race and ethnicity and depression, but the exact nature of the interaction is unclear. For poor women, rates of depression are high regardless of ethnicity. One study reviewed for the brief showed equal rates of depression among African American and Caucasian low-income women, while another study found no difference in prevalence between ethnic groups. “In effect, poverty trumps race as a factor in maternal depression,” says Knitzer.

But these efforts tend to be small and time-limited. “What we really need is to make sure that parents, especially of children from birth to age five can help both with both their depression and with ways to nurture their children,” says Knitzer. The report shows that across the country, as recognition grows of the importance of addressing parental depression, state and communities are trying to do the necessary policy fixes. But more leadership from both the states and the federal government is needed, and indeed, a critical part of an early childhood investment strategy.

“We believe that policies promoting treatment and support for one generation will promote healthy development and school readiness for the next generation,” says Knitzer. “Addressing maternal depression through a parenting and early childhood lens is in effect a ‘two-fer’ – it can help parents, but importantly, it will help their children, both in the short term and in the longer term.”

To read the full brief, “Reducing Maternal Depression and Its Impact on Young Children: Toward a Responsive Early Childhood Policy Framework,” access [www.nccp.org](http://www.nccp.org).

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*The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) is the nation’s leading public policy center dedicated to promoting the economic security, health and well-being of America’s low-income families and children. Part of Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health, NCCP uses research to inform policy and practice with the goal of ensuring positive outcomes for the next generation.*