

# Identifying women who have mental health problems during pregnancy and after birth

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## Policy implications

- Improved training for GPs and maternity healthcare professionals is needed to ensure all health professionals are aware of the importance of asking about mental health and feel confident to do so
- Cultural, language and social barriers to asking about mental health must be identified and overcome
- Better continuity of carer is needed
- There needs to be clear care pathways for referring women who require support

## Key findings

- The overall proportion of women who reported being asked about their mental health antenatally increased from 80.3% (95%CI:79.0-81.5) in 2014 to 83.4% (95%CI:82.1-84.7) in 2020.
- The proportion of women who reported being asked postnatally fell from 88.2% (95%CI:87.1-89.3) in 2014 to 73.7% (95%CI:72.2-75.2) in 2020.



- Women from ethnic minority backgrounds (shown below), women living in more deprived areas, and women living without or separately from a partner were less likely to report being asked.
- Therefore, the findings suggest that the women most likely to need support and treatment are the least likely to be supported in accessing it.

Antenatal	Ethnicity		2014		2018		2020	
	White	81.7	1	81.1	1	86.3	1	
Mixed	79.8	0.89	0.47, 1.65	77.4	0.87	0.48, 1.57	82.2	0.85
Asian	73.2	0.65	0.50, 0.85	62.3	0.39	0.29, 0.53	68.7	0.42
Black	79.6	0.99	0.60, 1.60	65.8	0.60	0.35, 1.04	75.4	0.64
Other	78.0	0.82	0.29, 2.32	72.5	0.63	0.32, 1.20	63.3	0.33

  

Postnatal	Ethnicity		2014		2018		2020	
	White	91.2	1	81.2	1	74.8	1	
Mixed	83.9	0.50	0.26, 0.98	70.8	0.56	0.33, 0.96	65.9	0.63
Asian	75.3	0.28	0.21, 0.38	69.2	0.55	0.39, 0.76	66.6	0.67
Black	80.7	0.43	0.26, 0.71	67.4	0.55	0.32, 0.95	75.7	0.98
Other	69.6	0.20	0.08, 0.50	74.0	0.52	0.26, 1.04	64.1	0.63

## Summary of the research

One in five women experience mental health problems, such as anxiety or depression, during their pregnancy or after giving birth.<sup>1</sup> Antenatal and postnatal appointments are key contact points for identifying women in need of support. Since 2014, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) has recommended that all women be asked about their mental health at their antenatal booking appointment and early in the postnatal period.<sup>2</sup> We aimed to find out whether women are being asked about their mental health in accordance with the guidelines.

We combined data from three large nationally-representative maternity surveys carried out in England in 2014<sup>3</sup> (N=4,571), 2018<sup>4</sup> (N=4,509) and 2020<sup>5</sup> (N=4,611). Mothers were identified by the Office for National Statistics using birth registration records. All were at least 16 years old, had given birth in England, and were contacted three to six months after childbirth.

We estimated the proportions of women who reported being asked about their mental health during their first pregnancy appointment and after giving birth. We evaluated sociodemographic disparities in who reported being asked about their mental health.

## Further information

<sup>1</sup> Howard, LM, Molyneaux, E, Dennis, C-L, Rochat, T, Stein, A, Milgrom, J. Non-psychotic mental disorders in the perinatal period. *Lancet*. 2014;384:1775–88.  
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg192/chapter/Recommendations>  
<sup>3</sup> Redshaw M, Henderson J. Safely delivered: a national survey of women’s experience of maternity care 2014. Oxford: National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit, University of Oxford 2014.  
<sup>4</sup> Harrison S, Alderdice F, Henderson J, Quigley MA. You and Your Baby: A national survey of health and care. Oxford: National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit, University of Oxford 2020; ISBN: 978-0-9956854-5-1.  
<sup>5</sup> Harrison S, Alderdice F, McLeish J, Quigley MA. You & Your Baby: A national survey of health and care during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic. Nuffield Department of Population Health, University of Oxford 2021; Report No.: 978-1-8383678-4–8.

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