

THE INSTITUTES AT NORTHWESTERN MEDICINE

**INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC HEALTH AND MEDICINE  
CENTER FOR COMMUNITY HEALTH**

**THE MOTHERS AND BABIES PROGRAM**  
*A Postpartum Depression Prevention Intervention*



## THE MOTHERS AND BABIES PROGRAM

### *A Postpartum Depression Prevention Intervention*

#### Introduction

Postpartum depression strikes women and their families during what is thought of as one of the happiest and most important times in a new mother's life. Pregnancy and having a new child in the home can certainly be an exciting time, but it can also be a stressful time. Many women experience stress during pregnancy and after delivery. For some, this stress is manageable but for many women the stress can be overwhelming and can lead to depression, anxiety, and challenges in taking care of a baby.

Postpartum depression occurs during the first year after childbirth. **It affects one in five women nationally with that number doubling among low-income women.** Postpartum depression can be caused by a combination of factors, including: biological factors, such as pregnancy-related changes in hormone levels, a lifetime history of depression, sleep deprivation, and fatigue. It can also be caused by emotional factors associated with an unplanned pregnancy, adjusting to the idea of having a new baby, or having a sick or premature baby, social factors such as lack of social support, stressful life events, or economic and environmental stressors. The public health impact of postpartum depression can lead to a chain reaction of poor outcomes across the life course. It has a "two-generation" impact by affecting both the mother and her child.

#### **Postpartum depression has profound effects on new mothers.**

Women often experience:

- Pervasive sadness, hopelessness, a loss of interest in people and activities that were once enjoyable, a lack of interest and connection with the baby, and even thoughts of death or suicide.
- A greatly increased likelihood of experiencing depression in the future, including subsequent pregnancies.
- Linkage to other lifetime serious health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, chronic pain, and substance abuse.
- Interference with work, educational activities, social activities, and connectedness.

#### **Postpartum depression has profound effects on infants and young children.**

Postpartum depression has a significant and negative impact on the development and behavior of infants and young children. A core characteristic of depression is social withdrawal, which can negatively affect a mother's social and physical interaction and attachment with her baby, who primarily learns through social interaction.

- Infants and young children are less likely to experience child-centered and responsive interactions if their mother is depressed. This greatly limits the development of a strong mother-child attachment.
- Children of depressed mothers are less likely to receive timely preventive healthcare services such as well-child visits and immunizations.
- Children whose mothers were depressed in the postpartum period have worse health, mental health, and educational outcomes into early childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood.



"Our goal is to bring the Mothers and Babies intervention to families and communities across the United States. We have sufficient evidence to know that Mothers and Babies works to reduce postpartum depression. We consistently receive high ratings for ease of use and enjoyment by providers and mothers alike. Mothers and Babies can be implemented in a variety of health and education settings that serve pregnant women and new mothers. Postpartum depression touches 20–40% of women—we have a real opportunity to address maternal depression on a large scale."

Darius Tandon, PhD, Director of the Mothers and Babies Program



## Mothers and Babies Program

Through the breakthrough **Mothers and Babies Program** at Northwestern Medicine, we have developed individual and group-based interventions to address postpartum depression. Mothers and Babies focuses on tools and support for pregnant women and new moms to effectively manage stress, as well as ways to think about and interact with one's baby to create an emotionally and physically healthy reality for him or her.

First and foremost, Mothers and Babies is a postpartum depression prevention intervention that is easy for providers to implement and easy for women to understand and use in their daily lives to improve mood and cope with stress. Based on principles of cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), attachment theory, and psychoeducation, the Mothers and Babies Course is designed to be delivered by clinic- or community-based providers from a variety of educational and professional backgrounds, and can be delivered as a group intervention or as a one-on-one intervention in various settings where pregnant women access services (e.g. prenatal clinics, home visiting programs, WIC programs, County Health Departments, etc.).

Our Mothers and Babies Program makes its home at Northwestern University's Institute for Public Health and Medicine in the Center for Community Health. Together with leading experts in the field we have built the Mothers and Babies program on years of depression prevention research. Through Mothers and Babies, we offer a useful "toolkit" of approaches for women to increase mindfulness, note factors affecting their mood, and make behavioral changes in their daily lives to impact these areas.

*Why is the Mothers and Babies Program so effective and helpful to women and their families?*

- *It is evidence-based. Mothers and Babies has been rated by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration clearinghouse as a promising practice in reducing depressive symptoms, and in improving personal resilience and self-concept.*
- *It is flexible to implement. [Available for group and 1-on-1].*
- *It can be delivered by different types of agencies that serve pregnant women and new mothers [home visiting, WIC, community health centers, etc.].*
- *It can be delivered by individuals without formal mental health training, making it more feasible and cost effective for programs to adopt and sustain.*

## Investments in Our Research Efforts

At Northwestern, we are committed to improving the lives of women, children, and families through rigorous research that focuses on maternal mental health. Through our research program, we are continually evaluating the effectiveness of the postpartum depression intervention delivered through various modalities (e.g. individually, group-based); developing innovative enhancements (e.g. text-message reinforcement, curriculum for fathers/co-parents); and are offering interventions in diverse settings (e.g. home visiting, prenatal care, community health centers).

Our leading-edge studies are supported by generous individuals and organizations, including The Ascend Program at the Aspen Institute, Florida Association of Healthy Start Coalitions, Friends of Prentice, Illinois Children's Healthcare Foundation, the National Institute of Minority Health and Health Disparities, Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute, the Robert R. McCormick Foundation, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The ongoing support and collaboration of the State of Illinois Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development has made our work possible with Illinois Home Visiting Programs, in cooperation with the Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership.

## Our Leadership

### **Darius Tandon, PhD**

*Director of the Mothers and Babies Program  
Associate Professor, Department of Medical  
Social Sciences  
Associate Director, Center for Community Health,  
Institute for Public Health and Medicine*

Through his professional training as a community psychologist and prevention scientist (University of Illinois at Chicago) and his subsequent academic career at Johns Hopkins University (2000-2013) and Northwestern University (2013–present), Dr. Tandon has focused his research on postpartum depression prevention among low-income perinatal women. In particular, he has focused his recent efforts on implementing and testing the Mothers and Babies program in various settings that serve pregnant women and new mothers.

In 2015, Dr. Tandon was selected to join the Aspen Institute Ascend Fellowship, a diverse and select group of leaders with innovative ideas to build economic security, educational success, and health and well-being for low-income families with a two-generation approach that invests in children and parents together. Dr. Tandon also currently serves as the lead faculty member for a national quality improvement initiative aimed at enhancing the manner in which home visiting programs identify and respond to women experiencing postpartum depression.

### **Philanthropy to Bring Mothers and Babies to the Nation**

After a decade of development and research, we have sufficient evidence to know that Mothers and Babies works to reduce postpartum depression and that Mothers and Babies can be implemented by a variety of providers among various settings. We have consistently high ratings of ease of use, applicability, and enjoyment by providers and mothers alike.

**For more information about supporting the Mothers and Babies Program, please contact:**

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Our goal is to bring our Mothers and Babies curriculum beyond Chicago to benefit families and communities across the United States. We are receiving continuous demand for training and implementation support from communities across the country, but often these requests come from organizations and agencies with limited financial resources.

We are seeking the philanthropic investment of our longtime supporters, as well as new friends, to accelerate our efforts to introduce and disseminate Mothers and Babies nationally. We also need funds to develop innovative training and implementation efforts that can be used to sustain the intervention. Specific funding needs include support for remote learning and web-based training resources, support for our trainers and mental health consultants, data management expertise, training subsidies for under-resourced programs, and technology-based resources to enable the implementation of the Mother and Babies program across the country.