

# Perinatal Mental Health

Child Development Conference

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# Trigger warning

- Sensitive information
- Professional trauma / vicarious
- Personal experiences
- Caring for yourself
  
- \*Confidentiality



# PERINATAL MENTAL HEALTH - WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

.....”any mental health condition: low mood/anxiety to a more serious mental health illness, that affects the mother from conception to her child being 2 years of age” .....

# And.....

“.....Perinatal mental health problems come in many shapes and forms, ranging from common mental illnesses that are easy to treat but can have a disproportionate impact on the baby – to really serious and unexpected mental illnesses, sometimes in people with no previous history of mental ill health.....”( Claire Lowe 2017)

# Emotional Wellbeing in Pregnancy



# WHY THE CONCERN?

- Mental illness is the leading cause of death for women of childbearing age: the latest MBRACE report cites this figure to be 40%
- Ante natal anxiety is a predictor for depression in the post natal period
- Depressive illness is the most common major complication of pregnancy
- Childhood maltreatment is major cause of adult mental health problems
- Maternal childhood maltreatment is THE single most powerful predictor of antenatal depression
- Often co exists with substance misuse and domestic abuse
- Children exposed to prenatal depression were 3.6 times more likely to suffer from maltreatment

# Facts

**The latest MBRRACE-UK  
report (2020-2022)**

**Mental Health biggest  
Killer**

**Suicide Leading cause of  
Maternal death from  
birth to 1 year postnatal**

# Prevalence

Postpartum  
Psychosis approx.  
1,300 (1-2 in 1000  
women)

Chronic serious  
mental illness  
approx. 1,300


Severe depressive  
illness approx.  
20,000

Post traumatic  
stress approx.  
20,000

Mild to moderate  
depressive illness  
and anxiety over  
80,000

Adjustment  
disorders over  
150,000

Mental health is the  
most common  
complication of  
pregnancy





# What mental health might you see in your work?

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Personality Disorder
- PTSD/ C-PTSD
- Psychosis
- Bi Polar /Schizophrenia
- OCD
- Intrusive thoughts

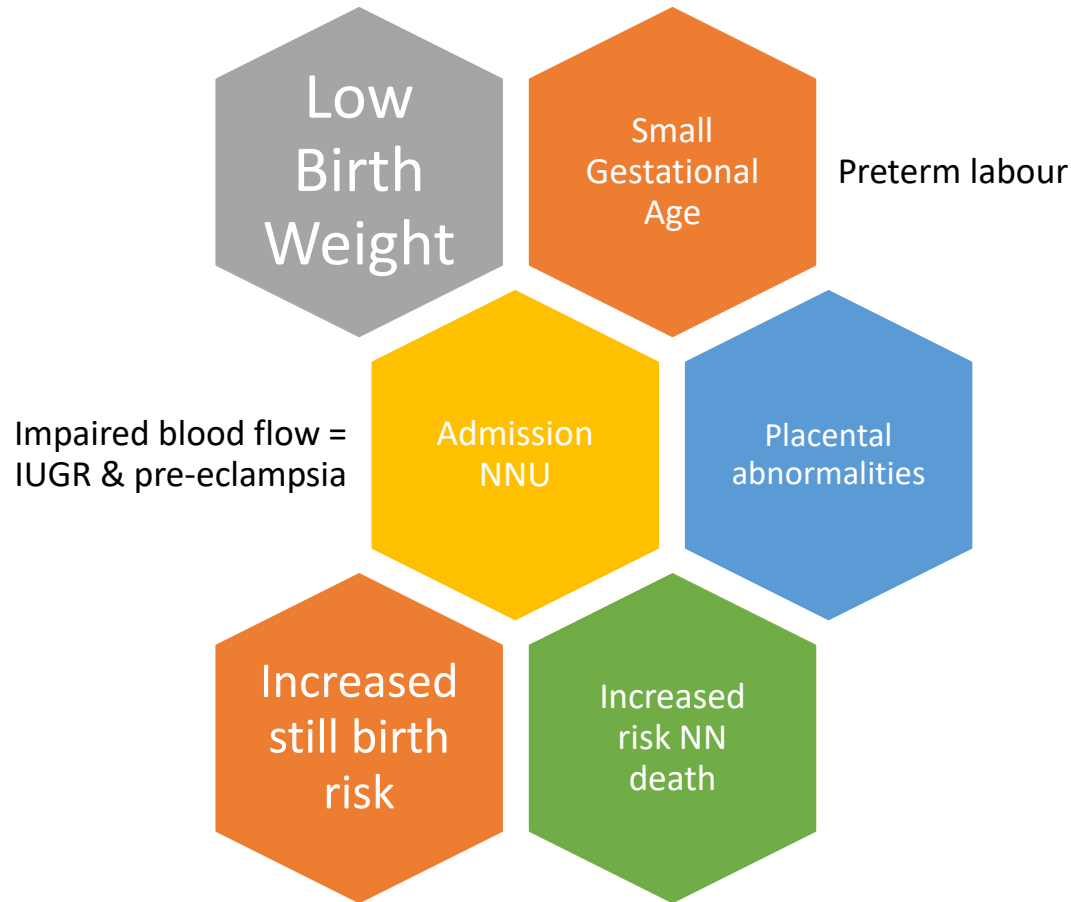
# Intrusive thoughts



**It is essential to understand that study after study shows that intrusive thoughts about infants are common in new mothers and fathers (Abramowitz et al, 2003)**

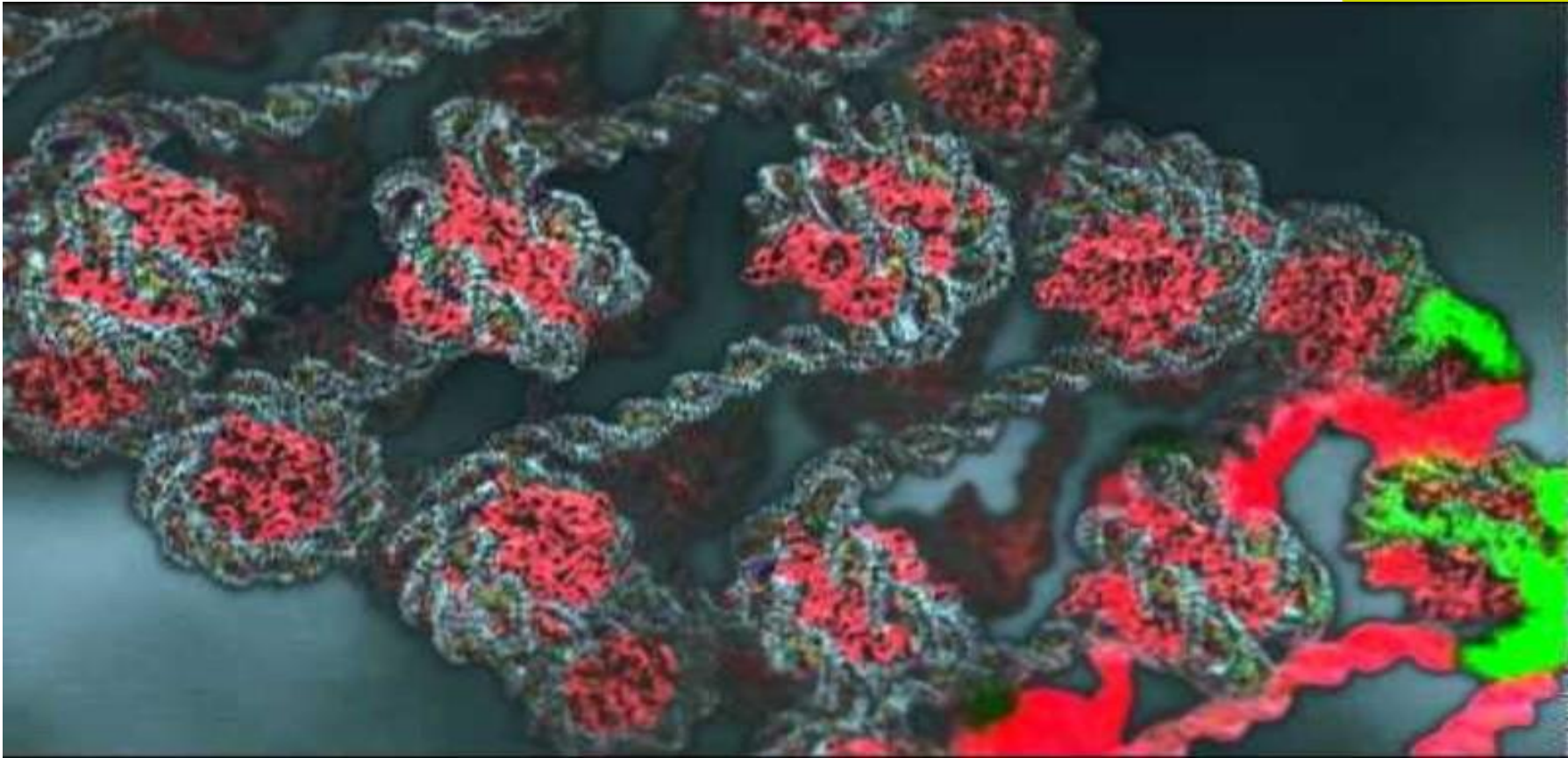
**That intrusive thoughts of all types, including deliberate and accidental harm, are experienced by mothers who will not have intention to harm (Fairbrother and Woody, 2008).**

# Pregnancy complications due to anxiety and depression



- During unknown different sensitive periods, stress can alter the development of the fetus, with a permanent effect on the child.
- The hormone Cortisone has been shown to cause epigenetic changes in the DNA

# Epigenetics: What Makes Us Who We Are? - Begin Before Birth



# On the baby / child.....

- Increased risk of admission to neo natal unit
- Emotional or cognitive problems
- Anxiety
- Language delay
- Increased risk of asthma
- Increased incidence of altered immune function
- Increased risk of dysfunctional attachment when parents own mental ill health affects parent/child interactions.
- Increased risk of predisposition to ADHD and emotional/behavioural problems due to neurological effects on fetus (raised cortisol) and ongoing developmental difficulties in the child
- Children who had parents with mental health problems are at increased risk of developing their own mental health problems

# On parenting

- Behaviour can be very challenging leading to parenting difficulties with inconsistent harsh discipline
- The maternal ability to care for and protect her baby may be impaired. Reduced oxytocin linked to reduction in checking behaviours.
- Difficulty with establishing breastfeeding
- Children who are raised in an emotionally sparse environment, are more likely to have as adults;
  - \*mental health problems
  - \*criminality
  - \*social care involvement with their own children

# The Financial Cost



*from The Costs of Perinatal Mental Health Problems, available at:*  
<http://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/perinatal>  
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- From an annual budget of £8 billion this equates to £5.76 billion pounds
- The cost to the public sector of perinatal mental health complications is 5 times the cost of service improvement

# To summarise

- Mothers who are pregnant produce high levels of cortisol. It is this chemical that has an adverse effect on the baby whilst in utero. It affects brain development, placental function, cell replication (epigenetics) and neurological pathway development .
- After birth, it continues to affect the baby's brain and neurological development. Babies themselves can present with higher levels of anxiety and an inability to self sooth.
- Mothers can have reduced oxytocin levels which reduces the natural availability of those maternal checking behaviours.



## ON A POSITIVE NOTE .....

- ‘.....adverse effects of perinatal disorders on children are not inevitable. Whether and to what extent children are affected depends on a range of mediating and moderating factors. The most important remediable factors include quality of parenting, social support and the length and severity of the parental disorder. Therefore, effective identification and (where necessary) early intervention ... are critical.....’ (NHS England 2016)

# What might support look like for mum?

## **Primary care:**

- Health Visiting
- Family Hub
- Growing little Minds
- Talking Therapies
- GP
- Social Prescribing
- Talkthru

## **Secondary Care:**

Specialist PNMHT  
Crisis team  
Core/Enhanced Team  
Paths

# Within social care.....

..... *“Engage with mental health Services”* .....

a phrase often used and written into Child Protection Plans and is not always helpful.

Someone who has experienced significant trauma needs to be at a stable point in their lives to recognise this and benefit from therapy.

It may be that the service most able to support them is not a mental health service

# Useful links to video clips

- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=m9OSN9APkUQ&t=11s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m9OSN9APkUQ&t=11s)
- Perinatal period
  
- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=YTTSXc6sARg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YTTSXc6sARg)
- Still face
  
- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNNsN9IJKws](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNNsN9IJKws)
- Brain architect
  
- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=abLhIGbNMKw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=abLhIGbNMKw)
- Charlotte Bevan
  
- [Epigenetics: What Makes Us Who We Are? - Begin Before Birth](#)
- Epigenetics
  
- <https://ihv.org.uk/news-and-views/voices/perinatal-positivity-new-film-to-help-health-visitors-talk-about-perinatal-mental-health/>