August 31, 2018

**Depression in Mothers May Alter Stress, Immune Markers in Children**

Depression in women may affect their children’s stress and physical well-being throughout life, according to a study published in *Depression & Anxiety*.

For the study, Adi Ulmer Yaniv, Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel, and colleagues followed 125 children from birth to age 10 years. At age 10 years, the researchers measured the cortisol and secretory immunoglobulin (s-IgA) levels in mothers and children and observed mother-child interaction. At this time, mothers and children also underwent psychiatric diagnoses and children’s externalising and internalising symptoms were reported.

The study found that mothers with depression had higher cortisol and s-IgA levels and displayed more negative parenting, characterised by negative affect, intrusion, and criticism. Children of depressed mothers tended to exhibit certain psychiatric disorders, have higher s-IgA levels, and display greater social withdrawal.

The researchers charted 4 paths by which depression in mothers impacted child externalising and internalising symptoms: increasing cortisol in mothers, which was linked with higher cortisol and behaviour problems in children; augmenting maternal and child’s immune response, which were associated with child symptoms; enhancing negative parenting that predicted child social withdrawal and symptoms; and via a combined endocrine‐immune pathway suppressing symptom formation.

“Following mothers and children across the first decade of life, we found that exposure to depression [in mothers] impairs functioning of the child’s immune system and stress response,” said Ruth Feldman, PhD, Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya, Hertsliya, Israel. “Such disruptions to the child’s stress and immune system, in turn, led to greater child psychopathology.”

“We also found that the impairments to the child’s stress response and immunity were shaped by similar effects of the depression on the mothers’ stress and immune system and their consequent impact on reducing the quality of maternal caregiving,” she continued. “Our findings show the complex effects of depression [in mothers] on children’s physiology, health, and psychopathology and advocate the need for early interventions that specifically target stress [in mothers] and enhance parenting behaviour.”

Reference: <https://doi.org/10.1002/da.22818>

SOURCE: Wiley