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# **SRIP 2019 Symposium: Paths of Support**

## **Navigating the transition to motherhood: The buffering role of social support in the relationship between unmet expectations and anxiety and depression**

**Floor van Rooij<sup>1</sup>, Peter Hoffenaar, Elise Rips**

### **Background**

Expectations of pregnant women regarding parenthood are often positive. Nevertheless, their experiences are not always in line with these expectations. Unmet parenthood expectations, when experiences are not as positive as expected, might lead to poorer adjustment to parenthood and to mental health problems. There are some indications that social support might have a protective role.

### **Aims and Objectives**

To test the buffering hypothesis, i.e. that social support reduces the negative effect of unmet expectations on anxiety and depression across the transition to motherhood.

### **Method**

98 Dutch mothers (Mage = 31.81; 62% primiparous) completed a questionnaire four months before giving birth (average) about their expectations regarding motherhood, feelings of anxiety and depression (T1) and a second questionnaire eight months after giving birth (average) regarding their motherhood experiences, feelings of anxiety and depression and experienced social support (T2). Multiple regression analyses were used with anxiety and depression at T2 as the dependent factors, unmet parenthood expectations (differences between expectations and experiences), social support (a lot or a little) and the interaction between unmet parenthood expectations and social support as the independent factors, and anxiety and depression at T1 as control variables.

### **Results**

Mothers with unmet expectations (when experiences are not as positive as expected) had increased feelings of anxiety and depression. This relationship existed regardless of mothers' experienced social support.

### **Interpretation / Discussion**

To help mothers make the transition to motherhood, one could steer towards realistic expectations in pregnancy consultations and courses.

### **Conclusions**

Mothers report more feelings of anxiety and depression when parenthood expectations during pregnancy are not met during the first year of the child. Social support does not have a buffering role in this relationship.

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