

Suicidal Ideation in the Postnatal Period

Why is suicidal ideation important and what does our research add?

- Suicide is a leading cause of maternal death in the first year postpartum in the UK¹
- Suicidal ideation (thoughts about suicide) is a known risk factor for suicide
- Our research highlights that the currently recommended depression screening tools may not identify all women with suicidal ideation

What did our study find?

1 in 25 postnatal women have suicidal ideation



Among women with suicidal ideation...



What does NICE guidance say?

- Health professionals should consider asking 2 depression identification questions as part of a discussion on mental health and wellbeing at antenatal and postnatal contacts.
- More comprehensive depression assessment tools can be considered if a woman screens positively on the depression identification questions.²

Policy Research Questions

- Are health professionals aware that some women experience suicidal ideation without having depression?
- For women who screen positively on the depression identification questions, should items that ask about suicidal ideation be evaluated separately?
- Should all women be asked a suicidal ideation question in addition to the depression identification questions?

Associated publication: Despotis A, Harrison S, Quigley MA, Alderdice F, Fellmeth G. Suicidal ideation in the postpartum period: A population-based study of prevalence and risk factors using data from two national maternity surveys in England. *Journal of Affective Disorders* 2025;389:119707. DOI: 10.1016/j.jad.2025.119707

References:

1. Felker A, Patel R, Kotnis R, Kenyon S, Knight M (Eds.) on behalf of MBRRACE-UK. Saving Lives, Improving Mothers' Care Compiled Report - Lessons learned to inform maternity care from the UK and Ireland Confidential Enquiries into Maternal Deaths and Morbidity 2021-23. Oxford: National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit, University of Oxford 2025. DOI: 10.5287/ora-4javr692x

2. National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. Antenatal and Postnatal Mental Health: Clinical Management and Service Guidance (CG192). London: National Institute for Health and Care Excellence; 2020.

Despotis A, Harrison S, Quigley MA, Alderdice F, Fellmeth G. Research summary for policymakers: Suicidal Ideation in the Postnatal Period. National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit, Nuffield Department of Women's and Reproductive Health, University of Oxford. 29 June 2026. doi.org/10.5287/ora-nb7e90aew

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