

# The Mother's Anxiety Study

## Research overview

The Mother's Anxiety Study had the aim of developing a valid and reliable self-report scale to screen for problematic anxiety during pregnancy and postnatally.

Anxiety disorders are as common as depression in the perinatal period, with a prevalence of up to 17%. High, untreated anxiety during the perinatal period may have far reaching potential risks for the physical and psychological health of the mother and baby. Early effective detection of problematic perinatal anxiety is crucial to enable early referral for treatment that may improve outcomes for mother and child. Developing an acceptable, reliable and valid screening scale for problematic perinatal anxiety is a world first and will significantly contribute to available tools for best practice screening for mental health in pregnant women and new mothers.

## Research highlights

- This research has been well received at national and international conferences
- Two research articles describing the development of the Perinatal Anxiety Screening Scale (PASS) and the development of severity ranges of anxiety have been published in academic journals
- A training manual has been developed to assist health professionals to use the PASS
- This study has made available a valid and easy to use screen for problematic anxiety, thus contributing to current best practice for perinatal mental health problems
- The scale has been requested for use in a number of countries and is being translated into different languages for further research and screening use.

## Research Achievements

- The Perinatal Anxiety Screening Scale (PASS) was based on international diagnostic criteria, clinical experience, a review of existing scales and input from women in the community
- The PASS has been validated for use with women during pregnancy and postnatally. Subscales addressing symptoms of panic and adjustment, excessive worry and phobia, perfectionism and control, and social anxiety, provide additional information about the nature of anxiety being experienced, adding to its clinical usefulness.
- A best clinical cut-off score was found where the PASS detected significantly more perinatal women with an anxiety disorder (68%) than the EPDS (36%) which is currently the most widely used screening scale in Australia
- PASS severity ranges were developed which enable classification of patients on a continuum ranging from minimal to moderate and severe anxiety to inform treatment, track patient progress, and assess the efficacy of mental health interventions in improving perinatal anxiety.

## THE TEAM

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