



Visionaries for the Future of Maternal Mental Health

Facts About Maternal Suicide

Suicide Rates as Compared to Other Maternal Deaths

- Although there is no national reporting of maternal suicide rates, from state data it is thought that suicide is one of the leading causes of maternal death in the US^{1,2} and is the leading cause of death in countries such as Japan³, the UK⁴, and Ireland.⁵
- Suicide accounts for up to 20% of postpartum deaths.^{6,7}
- Suicide is a leading cause of maternal death in the first year following childbirth.⁸
- Maternal suicide deaths are more common than maternal deaths caused by postpartum hemorrhage or hypertensive disorders.⁹
- Looking at data from 14 state maternal mortality review committees, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) notes mental health conditions (including suicide) are the 6th leading cause of pregnancy-related death^{†,10}
- Suicide is among the top three causes of pregnancy-associated deaths[†], as defined by the CDC.⁷
- In a review of Maternal Mortality Review Committees (MMRC) data in 14 states, mental health conditions, including suicide and overdose, were the underlying cause of 8.8% of pregnancy-related deaths.¹¹

Maternal Suicide Risk

- Sleep disturbances can increase risk of suicide in depressed postpartum moms.¹²
- The severity and rapidly evolving nature of postpartum psychosis increases the risk of maternal suicide.¹³
- Maternal suicide risk is not limited to the immediate postpartum period. It is important to continue providing women with mental health resources and support throughout the later postpartum period.¹⁴
- Though it can happen anytime during pregnancy and the postpartum period, one study found that maternal suicide was most frequently completed between 6 to 12 months postpartum.¹⁴
- Pregnancy does not protect against the risk of psychiatric disorders or suicide and the postpartum period has been identified as a vulnerable time for increased risk for mental health issues.²
- Previous suicide attempts and thoughts about suicide (suicidal ideation) can be risk factors for maternal suicide completion.⁷
- Depressed postpartum women who experienced childhood physical abuse are at significantly increased risk for frequent thoughts of self-harm.¹²

Suicidal Ideation (Thoughts About Suicide)

- Increased symptoms of anxiety have been linked to frequent thoughts of self-harm in depressed postpartum women.¹²
- 5-14% of women have thoughts about suicide during pregnancy and/or the postpartum period.⁶

[†]**Pregnancy-related death:** A death during or within one year of pregnancy, from a pregnancy complication, a chain of events initiated by pregnancy, or the aggravation of an unrelated condition by the physiologic effects of pregnancy.

[†]**Pregnancy-associated death:** A death during or within one year of pregnancy, regardless of the cause. These deaths make up the universe of maternal mortality; within that universe are pregnancy-related deaths and pregnancy-associated, but not related deaths.



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- During pregnancy suicide is an uncommon event, however thoughts about suicide (suicidal ideation) are relatively common among pregnant women.¹⁵
- Depression during pregnancy greatly increases thoughts about suicide while pregnant.⁷
- Complications during pregnancy are associated with having thoughts about suicide (suicidal ideations) during the postpartum period.¹⁶
- Women who had positive depression screens during the early postpartum period were more likely to have thoughts about suicide (suicidal ideations) during the later postpartum period.¹⁶
- Early identification of suicidal thoughts (ideation) is essential¹⁷, as research has shown that 74% of postpartum women who died by drugs or suicide made more than 1 emergency department or hospital visit between their delivery and death.¹⁴

Maternal Suicide and Race

- Asian women are nearly 9 times as likely to report thoughts about suicide (suicidal ideation) compared to white women in the immediate postpartum period.¹⁷
- Black women are 2 times as likely to report thoughts about suicide (suicidal ideation) compared to white women in the immediate postpartum period.¹⁷
- Latina women are almost 2 times as likely to report thoughts about suicide (suicidal ideation) compared to white women in the immediate postpartum period.¹⁷
- Women who self-report as “other race” are almost 3 times as likely to report thoughts about suicide (suicidal ideation) compared to white women in the immediate postpartum period.¹⁷
- According to death records from The National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), pregnancy-associated suicide is more likely to occur in older and non-Hispanic White women.¹⁸
- Pregnancy-associated suicide was less likely to occur in non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic women compared to non-Hispanic white women.¹⁸

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