



The Royal Australasian
College of Physicians

MEDIA RELEASE

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Infant sleep and crying problems impact on parent's mental health: RACP Congress

A new Australian study has found infant crying and sleeping problems do impact on the mental health of mothers and fathers, but a paediatric consultation giving advice is associated with improvement in mental health. The research paper by Dr Jayne Smart and colleagues from the Centre for Community Child Health, Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, is being presented to The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) Scientific Congress in Cairns today.

"It has been demonstrated that infant crying and sleep problems can impact on the mental health of mothers. However, our study looked at the affect on fathers as well - an area that has not been widely researched before," Dr Smart said.

In the study, 71 mothers and 59 fathers of infants aged 2 weeks to 7 months were recruited from 2004 to 2005, at Paediatric outpatient clinic at the Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne. The study measured maternal and paternal wellbeing, parent report of infant behaviour problems and usefulness of consultation advice.

"We found that 30% of fathers and 45% of mothers of infants with sleeping and crying problems demonstrate symptoms of depression. However, after a paediatric consultation the rates dramatically improved with only 19% of fathers and 15% of mothers feeling depressed," Dr Smart said.

The consultation with a paediatrician involved an examination of the infant to exclude any medical problems, and education about normal infant sleep and crying patterns and settling techniques.

Fewer parents reported that their infant's behaviour was still a problem after the consultation. Most parents rated exclusion of medical causes and information about normal sleep/crying and settling techniques as useful.

"The study demonstrates infant crying and sleeping problems can have a major impact on the mental health of parents. Consultation with a paediatrician is associated with an improvement in mental wellbeing," Dr Smart said.

The RACP is responsible for training, educating and representing over 9,000 physicians in Australia and New Zealand. The RACP represents 25 medical sub-specialties including paediatrics, public health and occupational medicine. Physicians are often called medical specialists. They are doctors who have completed an extra eight years or more of training after their initial university medical training. Patients are generally referred to a physician by a general practitioner seeking expert medical advice.

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