



**Answer to the call for input**  
OHCHR/WHO Guidance note on  
mental health, Human Rights and legislation  
(Draft of June 2022)

Make Mothers Matter (MMM) welcomes the *Guidance Note on mental health, Human Rights and legislation* and the opportunity to give feedback on its first draft.

**Given the prevalence of Peripartum mental health issues such as postpartum depression, the stigma around these issues, their important impact on mothers and their children, as well as their cost to society as a whole, we would like to suggest that a specific paragraph be added on *Maternal/peripartum mental health* in the section 2.1.4 on Challenging Stigma around mental health.**

*The rationale*

Pregnancy and the first year postpartum – referred to as the peripartum period – constitute a period of tremendous physiological, psychological, and social changes in women's lives. It is now well-established that the transition to motherhood is increasing women's vulnerability to the development of mental disorders.

It is estimated that **globally nearly 1 in 5 women** will develop mental health problems during pregnancy or within the first year postpartum – although there are important variations between countries<sup>1</sup>. The most prevalent peripartum mental health problems are depression and anxiety.

Additionally, research shows that many cases of postpartum mood disorders are undetected and therefore, untreated<sup>2</sup>. **This means that a large number of mothers suffer in silence, as the stigma and the lack of knowledge surrounding peripartum mental illnesses are significant barriers to accessing healthcare.**

**Peripartum illness not only adversely affects the mother and her overall health, but it also disrupts the mother-baby dyad and family relationships, which in turn affects the baby's health and early development.** We know that the earliest experiences shape a baby's brain development, and have a lifelong impact on their mental and emotional health, as well as their physical, intellectual and social development. **The neglect, stress or even violence that can result from a mother's mental health problems can produce physiologic disruptions or biological memories that undermine a child's development and their potential for productive participation in society later in life.**

And this translates into a high financial cost on society as a whole: a 2014 study by the London School of Economics has shown that economic costs of peripartum mental illness for the UK society is about £8.1 billion for each one-year cohort of births, of which 72% relates to the child and 28% to

<sup>1</sup> Hahn-Holbrook J., Cornwell-Hinrichs T. & Anaya I. (2018). Economic and Health Predictors of National Postpartum Depression Prevalence: A Systematic Review, Meta-analysis, and Meta-Regression of 291 Studies from 56 Countries. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 8. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2017.00248>

<sup>2</sup> Ashley O. Coates, C. Schaefer, J. Alexander (April 2004). Detection of postpartum depression and anxiety in a large health plan. *The Journal of Behavioral Health Services & Research*. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/BF02287376>

the mother<sup>3</sup>. The LSE report also suggests that the cost to the public sector of peripartum mental health problems is 5 times the cost of improving services.

**It is therefore crucial that Peripartum mental health problems be better recognized and addressed. The Guidance Note provides an opportunity to put a spotlight on these issues so that more be done on prevention, detection and treatment.**

*What the Law can say*

Maternal Mental health assessment should be included in planned antenatal and postnatal care visits and related costs seen as an investment.

### **About Make Mother Matter - MMM**

Make Mothers Matter believes in the power of mothers to make the world a better place, advocating for their recognition and support as changemakers. Created in 1947, MMM is an international NGO with no political or religious affiliations, transparently voicing the concerns of mothers at the highest level: the European Union, UNESCO and the United Nations (general consultative status). MMM also federates a network of about 40 grassroots organisations working in about 30 countries across the world to support and empower mothers and their families, and to advance the human rights of women and children.

MMM is part of Rise-Up PPD<sup>4</sup>, an EU-funded COST Action dedicated to promoting women's health in the peripartum period and to achieving a more standardized and unified approach in recognizing, treating, and preventing peripartum depression (PPD). It is an international, interdisciplinary network that joined forces to bring about changes in the field of perinatal mental health.

More information on [www.makemothersmatter.org](http://www.makemothersmatter.org)

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<sup>3</sup> Bauer, A., Parsonage, M., Knapp, M., Lemmi, V., & Adelaja, B. (2014). The costs of perinatal mental health problems. London: Center for Mental Health and London School of Economics. <https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/59885/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://riseupppd18138.wordpress.com/>