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**Abstract Title**

Prevalence and trajectory of mental health disorders among mothers of children with autism: A Manitoba Population-Based Study

## Authors

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**Background**

Changes in the mental health status of mothers of children with autism are poorly understood. We compared the prevalence of mental health disorders in mothers of children with and without autism during the perinatal period and at school entry and assessed changes in mental health status between the two periods.

**Objective**

To compare the prevalence of mental health disorders in mothers of children with and without autism from the perinatal period through school entry using a Manitoba population-based cohort.

**Methods**

Population-based data linkage study. Mothers of children  $\leq 6$  years diagnosed with autism (2016–2022) were compared with mothers of same-aged children without autism. Autism was defined using a clinical registry and healthcare records ( $\geq 1$  hospitalization or  $\geq 2$  physician visits with an autism ICD code). We examined the prevalence of maternal mental health disorders (mood/anxiety, substance use, personality, psychotic, and any disorder) during the perinatal period ( $\pm 1$  year of delivery) and at school entry (ages 5–7) using physician claims and hospitalizations, and calculated risk ratios to assess changes over time

between groups.

### **Results**

A total of 124,215 mothers were included, of whom 3,495 (2.81%) were mothers of children with autism. Prevalence of all mental health disorders was higher among mothers of children with autism both in the perinatal period and child's school entry. Table 1. Mothers in the autism group were more likely to receive a new mental health disorder diagnosis between the perinatal period and their child's school entry, including mood and anxiety (adjusted RR 1.21 95%CI, 1.13-1.30), and psychotic disorders (adjusted RR 1.90 95%CI:1.33-2.71).

### **Conclusion**

Mothers of children with autism have a higher prevalence of mental health disorders both during the perinatal period and at the time of school entry than mothers of children without autism. They are also more likely to develop a mental health disorder between these periods. It is imperative to advocate for stronger mental health supports for mothers of children with autism.

### **Table/Figure File**

table1.pdf