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Maternal Depression and Children's Growth: Data From Brazil.

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Physical growth is considered one of the most important indicators of child health. Stunting caused by undernutrition is indirectly responsible for more than half of deaths among young children globally and can have adverse developmental repercussions. Until recently, research on risk factors for suboptimal growth has focused primarily on micronutrient deficiencies and child illness, with little attention paid to potential social predictors such as maternal mental health. The current presentation summarizes the 1) results of a child health study from Brazil showing an association between maternal depressive symptoms and stunting in children under two years of age, 2) similar findings from a systematic review and meta-analysis that pooled results from seventeen studies in eleven low- and middle- income countries, 3) results from a longitudinal US representative sample that found maternal depressive symptoms at nine months postpartum related to an increased odds of a child being <10% in height-for-age at ages four and five, and 4) a discussion of potential mechanisms that could explain these associations. We will compare our results and discuss them in the context of other findings examining growth trajectories. Our results suggest that maternal depression and depressive symptoms during infancy can impact physical growth in early childhood in a variety of settings, both developed and developing countries. Prevention, early detection and treatment of maternal depressive symptoms during the first year postpartum may prevent stature deficits in later childhood.