

# Effective, Affordable, And Accessible Treatment for Pregnancy's Commonest Complication: Online Synchronous Interpersonal Psychotherapy for Mothers with Postpartum Depression

Dr. Vivian Polak, MD<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Lena Verdeli, PhD<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Wendy Lou, PhD<sup>3</sup>, and Caroline Lovett, MA<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences, McMaster University, Canada

<sup>2</sup>Department of Clinical and Counseling Psychology, Teachers College, Columbia University, Canada

<sup>3</sup>Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto, Canada

<sup>4</sup>Department of Clinical and Counseling Psychology, Teachers College, Columbia University, Canada

## ABSTRACT

Postnatal depression (PND) is a common complication of childbirth that increases the risk of future depressive episodes in women, postpartum depression in partners, as well as social, emotional, behavioural, language, and cognitive problems in offspring. Although psychotherapy, and in particular Group Interpersonal Psychotherapy (IPT-G), has been proven effective in treating PND, it remains largely inaccessible. However, research has indicated that online synchronous group therapy can be equally as effective as in-person therapy and is a more affordable and accessible modality of treatment. This study aimed to ascertain whether delivering IPT-G virtually, when compared to treatment as usual, could more effectively reduce depressive and anxiety symptoms, enhance mother-infant attachment, improve the couple relationship, augment social support, improve overall functioning, and enhance the quality of life for women in rural and northern Ontario who are suffering from PND. By bridging the gap in access to mental health services during the postpartum period, this study seeks to improve the well-being of mothers and their families in rural and northern Ontario, Canada. A randomized controlled trial was conducted to determine whether virtual IPT-G plus treatment as usual would be more effective than treatment as usual alone in treating women with PND in Ontario,

Canada. Preliminary results indicate that women who received virtual IPT-G had a clinically and statistically significant decrease in overall depressive symptoms compared to their counterparts who received only the treatment as usual. As such, providing online synchronous IPT-G in the perinatal period not only has the potential to improve women's outcomes in the present, but to also decrease future health costs, reduce burden on the educational and justice systems, and decrease the number of disability life years lost to postnatal depression.

**Keywords:** Family wellbeing; group psychotherapy; Interpersonal Psychotherapy; postnatal depression; virtual psychotherapy