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This is the **Submitted Version** of a paper published in the journal Australian Nursing Journal:

Emmanuel, Elizabeth, and Sun, Jing (2013) *Does maternal expectations influence health related quality of life during pregnancy?* Australian Nursing Journal, 21 (2). p. 38.

<http://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=465640507757294;res=IELHEA>

Does maternal expectations influence health related quality of life during pregnancy?

During pregnancy, expectations develop as women prepare themselves for motherhood. These expectations suggest functioning and performance continues as before the pregnancy. Often mothers anticipate that they will be able to maintain their health related quality of life (HRQoL) despite the increased challenges and hassles pregnancy brings. Few studies have investigated the effect of maternal expectations on HRQoL in pregnancy. The aim of the study was to examine the influence of maternal expectations on HRQoL during pregnancy.

A cohort study design was done involving 630 women in their last trimester of pregnancy. Measures of maternal expectations, HRQoL, maternal distress and social support were taken. Results showed that for many women expectations regarding friends had a negative effect on physically taking on the new role of mother; and the anticipated joy of expecting a baby had an undesirable influence on a mother's general health. Maternal expectations on life adjustments and social activities were negatively related to mental health.

Midwives need to appreciate that developing expectations is part of the maternal role development process that takes place during pregnancy. Often these expectations can have a negative effect on a mother's HRQoL - both in the physical and mental health domains. Therefore, midwives can enhance the developmental process by encouraging mothers to have realistic as opposed to unrealistic expectations; and to have normal expectations rather than have too little or too high expectations. One way of doing this is by reviewing a mother's functioning capacity on each antenatal visit and ascertaining whether she is comfortable about achieving her expectations as they evolve over time.

265 words

Authors:

Elizabeth N. Emmanuel RN, RM, MN, PhD

Senior Lecturer

School of Nursing, Midwifery & Nutrition

James Cook University, Cairns, Australia

Ph (w)61+7+4042 1306

(h) 61+7+3209 8722

Fax 61+7+4042 1590

Email: elizabeth.emmanuel@jcu.edu.au

Jing Sun, PhD

Senior Lecturer

School of Public Health,

Griffith University, Gold Coast, Australia

Email: j.sun@griffith.edu.au