# Chapter 39 Childbirth and Stress

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# Abstract

Childbirth is an intense event that involves extreme physical stress and is of emotional, cognitive, social, and cultural significance. It is a very common and predictable event that enables us to study the interaction between pre-birth and birth factors in perceived stress and the effect of this on physical and psychological outcomes. Pregnancy and childbirth are complex physiological processes that involve many of the same processes involved in stress responses. Approximately 15-20% of women in Western countries rate their childbirth as traumatic. Postpartum posttraumatic stress disorder is a distressing and disabling condition that can also have important negative consequences for the attachment relationship with the baby and the development of the child. This chapter provides an overview of the current evidence and theoretical models of stress and trauma in childbirth for the parents and maternity staff, and discusses the economic costs and clinical implications.