

Co-Morbid Ripple Effect: Systems Approach to Childbirth PTSD and Postpartum Depression

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Abstract & References



Background

- Self-harm causes 20% of U.S. maternal deaths (CDC, 2022).
- The co-occurrence of childbirth-related PTSD (CB PTSD) and postpartum depression (PPD) sharply increases suicide risk (Flory & Yehuda, 2015).
- Untreated perinatal mental health issues cost \$14 billion annually (Donegan et al., 2025).
- Clinical complexity of co-occurring PPD and CB PTSD is less understood and may need improved screening.
- Symptom overlap or unique biological factors may drive co-occurrence (Flory & Yehuda, 2015)

Purpose

This framework combines Beck’s Ever-Widening Ripple Effect (Beck, 2015) with a multilevel nested systems approach to explain co-morbid factors of postpartum depression and CB PTSD. It offers researchers a map for integrating complexity and multilevel concepts to improve hypothesis creation and contextualizing research.

Description

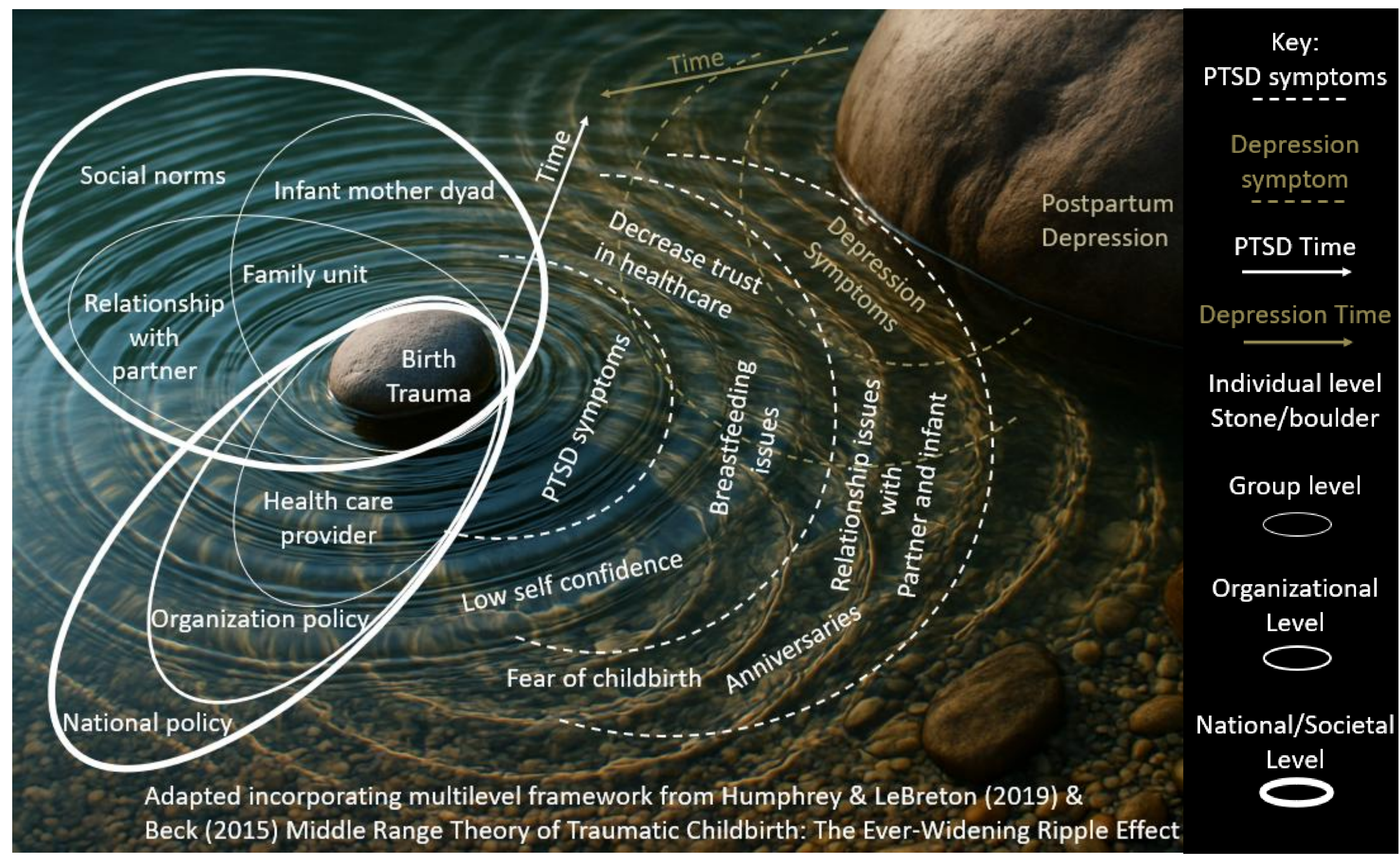
The model uses a stone disrupting water to illustrate how birth trauma affects individual functioning, leading to PTSD symptoms like low self-confidence, breastfeeding issues, diminished trust in healthcare, and strained relationships. A boulder represents postpartum depression interacting with trauma, altering its effects. Each mental health challenge adds complexity to these patterns, and the model also accounts for partner, infant, and provider impacts within the family unit.

Logic

The model links mechanisms across individual, family, provider, organizational, and policy levels to guide research toward practical solutions. It highlights how social norms affect family interactions, provider behavior is shaped by organizations and policies and emphasizes tracking symptom changes over time.

Conclusion

The integrative model provides a framework to investigate the complexity trauma-driven morbidity. Identifying multilevel targets (dyad, provider, organization, and policy) allows for focused contextual research and offers a theory-driven scaffold that elevate how contextual forces moderate outcomes. This framework supports hypothesis generation, informs methodology and guides trauma-informed, family-centered, and systems-aware research agendas to aid in supporting a mother’s ability to cope with disruptions in functional patterning.



Acknowledgement: ChatGPT version 5.0 was used for generating the background image; all text and shapes were conceptualized and added independently.