

LETTER TO THE EDITORReceived: May 28th 2020
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Published: September 10th 2020**PERINATAL MENTAL HEALTH AND MATERNAL STRESS
DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: INFLUENCE ON FETAL DEVELOPMENT****Rafael A. Caparros-Gonzalez (1) and Miguel Ángel Luque-Fernández (2,3)**

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To the Editor:

The authors have read with interest the recently published article in the Revista Española de Salud Pública entitled “Covid-19 and Mental Health”⁽¹⁾. In this article, its authors very correctly exposed the fact that the mental health consequences of SARS-CoV-2 may be due to its direct effects and also to the indirect ones derived from the pandemic in which we are still immersed. In the aforementioned article by Fernández Bretón and García San Miguel⁽¹⁾, vulnerable groups of people that may suffer from mental health problems during the pandemic include people with a previous mental illness, hospitalized, isolated people, those affected by an economic crisis and health-care providers. However, pregnant women were not included.

Pregnancy is a stage of happiness and well-being, but it is also a period of vulnerability in which adverse environmental and psychosocial factors can influence, including exposure to viruses⁽²⁾. For example, it can be mentioned the virus that caused the 1918 flu pandemic, known as the Spanish flu, which caused the death of 50 million people worldwide and produced negative consequences on maternal-child health⁽³⁾. In this sense, those babies who were exposed to the 1918 influenza virus during

their fetal development had a higher incidence of diseases throughout their lives, such as schizophrenia, acute myocardial infarction, diabetes or cancer⁽³⁾. This relationship between the environment pregnant women are exposed to and maternal health in the perinatal period is in accordance with Barker’s hypothesis of the origin of health and disease during the embryonic and fetal development period (Developmental Origin of Health and Disease theory -DOHaD-)⁽⁴⁾.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, various factors may be affecting mental health in the perinatal period in relation to the high levels of stress to which pregnant women are exposed to during this global Public Health crisis. In this way, the restriction of movements during the Covid-19 pandemic, physical and social distancing, less social support from relatives and friends, and the fear of infection could be sources of stress that during pregnancy can have negative consequences both on pregnant women and the developing fetus⁽⁵⁾. In addition, solid scientific evidence is required on the health impact of the SARS-CoV-2 virus on pregnant women and their children. Specifically, no information is available regarding risk factors and prognosis during pregnancy in case of SARS-CoV-2 infection. There is also insufficient evidence

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regarding the presence and characteristics of vertical transmission or during breastfeeding. Therefore, epidemiological studies characterizing the Covid-19 disease during pregnancy are necessary. Additional potential sources of stress for pregnant women during the current pandemic are having to work from home, in many cases having to combine work activity with care and home-schooling for other children, financial problems and an increased risk of intimate partner violence. These potential sources of maternal stress can act as risk factors and affect the psychosocial health of pregnant women. All pregnant women, in addition to the serological evaluation of their immunity status with respect to Covid-19 and their active monitoring during pregnancy, should undergo a psychological assessment to evaluate their mental health status throughout pregnancy and postpartum⁽⁶⁾. The objective would be the primary prevention of potential alterations in their psychosocial wellbeing and therefore, from a Public Health perspective, enhance the positive state of physical, psychosocial and mental health, during the prenatal, perinatal and postnatal maternal period.

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