

# Member Spotlight

Dr. Lianne Tomfohr-Madsen



## Dr. Lianne Tomfohr-Madsen Shares Research on Perinatal Mental Health with Parliament



*Written by Lucas Walters, BSc (Ottawa)*

Dr. Lianne Tomfohr-Madsen is an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Calgary, a Child Health and Wellness Researcher at the Alberta Children's Hospital Research Institute and private practice clinician. Dr. Tomfohr-Madsen has a variety of research experiences and skills with a focus on parental health, mental health, and sleep. Her primary research interests focus on understanding and preventing transgenerational transmission of health risk. With an impressive research portfolio and a host of clinical skills, we had the chance to ask Dr. Tomfohr a few questions related to their experiences and recent projects. More information about Dr. Tomfohr can also be found on their lab's website ([www.healthyfamilieslab.com](http://www.healthyfamilieslab.com)).

**I understand that you recently presented some of your research to members of parliament. Can you tell me more about that?**

I was presenting some of the data from a pan Canadian study called, *Pregnancy during the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Myself and Drs. Catherine Lebel and Gerry Giesbrecht are following over 8200 Canadian women who have been pregnant or given birth since COVID-19 began with the goal of understanding the impact of the pandemic on pregnancy, mental health, birth outcomes, and bonding experiences. Our presentation to parliament aimed to raise awareness of the unmet mental health needs in pregnant and postpartum women. We were also calling for a national strategy to improve parent mental health and create a comprehensive, culturally sensitive framework for screening and treating mental health problems in new parents.

**What research project or experience are you most proud of?**

I am very proud of the work we have done in my lab examining family socioeconomic status (SES) and associations with birth and child outcomes. In particular, I am proud that this research has identified modifiable factors like sleep and mental health as contributing to inter-generational transmission of stress -- these factors are modifiable, and I can see psychology's role in promoting healthier outcomes for underserved populations.

(cont'd)



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### What experiences have shaped your career the most?

I am very invested in improving teaching, training and research as it relates to issues of equity and diversity. I have been fortunate to have been exposed to diverse world views and perspectives throughout my life and in my academic career. Hearing the opinions and experiences of people that are vastly different from my own has shaped the direction of my career and service and lead to me to try to incorporate more diversity of views in all areas of my work.

### Through your roles, affiliations, and responsibilities, what is your favorite part of being a researcher in health psychology?

By far, the best part of my job is working clinically and getting to supervise students as they develop into confident and competent clinicians. I really believe in a clinician-scientist model of training and that working with clients informs patient relevant research. Seeing students translate their clinical experiences into their research is the best part of the job, especially when it is focused on helping populations who would not usually have access to good psychological care.

### What advice do you have for early career researchers in the field of health psychology and behavioural medicine?

There can be an expectation in academia that you need work all the time to achieve career success — I recommend that people really fight that urge and invest heavily in their relationships, and valued activities outside of work. At work, surround yourself with people who support your success and whose work you can also support. There is no greater gift at work than having collaborators who bring their whole selves to work. Aim to be that person and surround yourself with people who support you.

### What research are you planning over the next year?

Over the next year, I am very focussed on getting a number of interventions launched that are aimed at improving the mental and physical health of people transitioning to parenthood. One of these is a telephone-based peer intervention for women who are experiencing depression in pregnancy, and another is development of an app that aims to both treat transdiagnostic emotional distress and improve parenting outcomes. I hope that both of these contribute to a literature showing that early systemic investments in mental health can significantly improve parent and child outcomes.

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