

# Care4Mommies in action: Study protocol for promoting maternal psychological adjustment in the perinatal period

Lara Palmeira<sup>1,2</sup>, Ana Xavier<sup>1,2</sup>, Joana Silva<sup>1</sup>, Ana Conde<sup>1</sup> & Paula Vagos<sup>2,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>CINTESIS.UPT@RISE-HEALTH, Universidade Portucalense Infante D. Henrique, Porto, Portugal; <sup>2</sup>University of Coimbra, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Center for Research in Neuropsychology and Cognitive Behavioral Intervention (CINEICC), Portugal; <sup>3</sup>William James Center for Research, Department of Education and Psychology, University of Aveiro, Portugal.

Corresponding author: Lara Palmeira ([larap@upt.pt](mailto:larap@upt.pt))

## INTRODUCTION

- ✓ **Becoming a mother is a life-changing event** that may be facilitated by the mothers' emotional regulation skills, namely self-compassion (Carona et al., 2022).
- ✓ **Maternal self-compassion** seems to contribute to better psychological adjustment, responsiveness towards the baby, and mother-infant bonding in the postpartum (Fernandes et al., 2021).
- ✓ **Compassion-based interventions (CBIs)** may be useful to the transition to motherhood, but their application to promote maternal wellbeing and mother-baby bonding has been scarcely considered, with the few existing studies reporting promising findings (Millard & Wittkowski, 2023).
- ✓ **CBIs** may be particularly suited for the perinatal period, as they not only focus on cultivating a non-judgemental attitude but also **explicitly target the promotion of positive emotions of soothing and caring**, decreasing maternal self-criticism (Millard & Wittkowski, 2023).

## AIM

To **Care4mommies in action project** aims to explore the acceptability, feasibility and preliminary efficacy of a CBI applied during pregnancy on the well-being and quality of mother-baby bonding at postpartum. To do so, two sequential studies will be conducted.

## STUDY 1

Can the Care4mommies intervention work when delivered to pregnant women in public health care facilities?

1-3 focus groups with either nurses in prenatal services or pregnant women in the last trimester will inform on the anticipated acceptability of the Compassion Mind Training (CMT).

The adjusted CBI will be piloted with the pregnant women to test for:

- Pre- to post intervention change in self-compassion, maternal-fetal attachment, fear of self-compassion, self-criticism, and mental health.
- Post intervention qualitative data on the appropriateness of data collection procedures, outcome measures, and implementation feasibility



## CONCLUSION

- ✓ This project will allow for the development and initial efficacy evaluation of a tailored intervention that may contribute to mother's well-being and their ability to cope with becoming a mother and bonding with their baby, which in turn may facilitate the child's later emotional, social and cognitive development.

## STUDY 2

Does the Care4mommies intervention work to promote mothers' compassion and higher quality of the mother-baby bonding?

A pilot cluster randomized trial study will be conducted to investigate change following CMT in comparison to treatment as usual (i.e., birth preparation courses).

Participants in the CMT condition will receive 6 weekly sessions of 2 hours each, lead by a nurse and clinical psychologist. Sessions will be focused on promoting compassion skills, resorting to experiential exercises.

Participants in both conditions will be assessed at pre- and post-intervention (both prepartum) and at 3-months follow-up (post-partum) to test for:

- Pre- to post-intervention change in self-compassion, fears of self-compassion, self-criticism, well-being, maternal-fetal attachment.
- Follow-up change in self-compassion, fears of self-compassion, self-criticism, well-being, mother-baby bonding, baby temperament, shame and guilt in caring.

Mothers in the CMT condition are expected to experience increased self-compassion, mental health and mother-baby bonding quality, while decreasing self-criticism, fears of compassion, and shame and guilt.

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**Funding:** This research was supported by national funds through FCT (Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology), within the project 2023.11605.PEX. (<https://doi.org/10.54499/2023.11605.PEX>)