

## **Mothers' experiences of wellbeing and coping while living with rheumatoid arthritis**

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Background: Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) can have a significant impact on women's ability to undertake the daily tasks associated with mothering, which can lead to distress and challenges to identity. Previous studies have tended to focus on early mothering and pregnancy outcomes. Few studies have addressed how women experience motherhood in the context of rheumatoid arthritis, including the implications for health-related quality of life, across child age.

Method: One hundred and seventeen mothers with an RA diagnosis and a child 18 years or under took part in a self-report survey examining disease activity (RADAI), disease impact (RAID), parenting disability (PDI), parenting stress (PSS), and health-related quality of life (SF-12); 20 mothers took part in individual semi-structured interviews.

Results: Lower health-related quality of life was predicted by higher disease activity, disease impact, and parenting disability across child age. Thematic analysis of interview transcripts identified the following themes: 'Burden and complexity in the mothering role', 'Losing control: Women's experiences of distress', and 'Adjusting and letting go: Women's experiences of wellbeing'.

Conclusion: Health-related quality of life is associated difficulties performing mothering activities, in addition to disease impact and activity. Women reported greater ease as a mother due to increased independence of older children in qualitative accounts. However, reports of distress were given across child age that were associated with a loss of control over

mothering practices, including feelings of failure. In contrast, adjusting mothering practices and relinquishing control were associated with accounts of wellbeing. Absence of social support was reported to exacerbate, and availability of social support alleviate burden and distress. These findings have implications for the way that health professionals and services support mothers with RA, including addressing feelings of failure as a mother and encouraging access to social support.