

## Effect of Pregnancy Intention, Postnatal Depressive Symptoms and Social Support on Early Childhood Stunting: Findings from India

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**Abstract :** Background: According to United Nation Children's Fund, it has been estimated that worldwide about 165 million children were stunted in 2012 and India alone accounts for 38% of global burden of stunting. In terms of incidence, India is home of more than 60 million stunted children worldwide. Our study aims to examine the effect of pregnancy intention and maternal postnatal depressive symptoms on early childhood stunting in India. We hypothesized that effect of pregnancy intention and postnatal maternal depressive symptoms were mediated by social support. Methods: We used data from first wave of Young Lives Study India. Out of 2011 children recruited in original cohort, 1833 children had complete information on pregnancy intention, maternal depression and other variables. A series of multivariate logistic regression model were used to examine the effect of pregnancy intention and postnatal depressive symptoms on early childhood stunting. Results: Bivariate result indicates that a higher percent of children born after unintended pregnancy (40%) were stunted than children of intended pregnancy (26%). Likewise, proportion of stunted children was also higher among women of high postnatal depressive symptoms (35%) than low level of depression (24%). Results of multivariate logistic regression model indicate that children born after unintended pregnancy were significantly more likely to be stunted than children born after intended pregnancy (Coefficient: 1.70, CI: 1.17, 2.48). Likewise, early childhood stunting was also associated with maternal postnatal depressive symptoms among women (Coefficient: 1.48, CI: 1.16, 1.88). The effect of pregnancy intention and postnatal depressive symptoms on early childhood stunting remains unchanged after controlling for social support and other variables. Conclusions: The findings of this study provide conclusive evidence regarding consequences of pregnancy intention and postnatal depressive symptoms on early childhood stunting in India. Therefore, there is need to identify the women with unintended pregnancy and incorporate the promotion of mental health into their national reproductive and child health programme.

**Keywords :** pregnancy intention, postnatal depressive symptoms, social support, childhood stunting, young lives study, India

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