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**“The Madonna Myth” - the ideology of
motherhood and it’s influence on women
with Postnatal Depression**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of the degree of
Master of Social Work**

**at Massey University, Turitea, Palmerston North,
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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores whether societal myths surrounding motherhood can contribute to the development of Postnatal Depression (PND) for some women. It considers the social construction of motherhood and the transmission of powerful messages to women, both before and during motherhood. It examines what happens when the reality of motherhood does not meet the idealised images of motherhood.

The research involved face to face interviews with six women who had experienced PND. The key findings were that there are two strong myths surrounding motherhood. Mothers and non-mothers keep these alive in society. The myths are firstly, that motherhood is a natural stage for women in heterosexual relationships and that therefore the act of mothering is instinctual. The second myth is that motherhood brings with it fulfilment and happiness for the individual woman. The research found that the reality of motherhood also contains losses of identity and feelings of guilt and failure. These feelings are compounded for women with PND.

The findings give rise to recommendations including increasing education and information about PND for pregnant women, increasing support services for new mothers more open and honest discussion in society about the realities of motherhood and the need to value mothers and their contribution to society.

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