



# Research Impact Case Study

**Institution:** School of Nursing and Midwifery, Trinity College Dublin

**Theme:** Maternal Health

**Title of the Case Study:**

Beyond Birth: Changing Conversations on Maternal Health

**Period When the Research Was Undertaken:** 2011-Present

## Details of staff conducting the research:

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## 1. Summary of the Impact

The MAMMI (Maternal health And Maternal Morbidity in Ireland) study has transformed postpartum care by illuminating and addressing women's often overlooked health needs after childbirth. Informed by MAMMI's findings, the WHAM (Women's Health After Motherhood) online course – co-designed with women and based on what women said 'they wished they had known' – has delivered accessible, evidence-based information to over 14,000 participants across 130 countries, empowering women and their partners while strengthening clinical practice. WHAM is now embedded in antenatal education nationally and used by all maternity hospitals and maternity healthcare professionals to complement and enhance care. MAMMI has elevated women's voices in academic, clinical, and public spheres, with women actively co-authoring publications and co-presenting findings. The study directly contributed to the establishment of Ireland's first national network of postnatal care hubs in 2022, ensuring structured midwifery-led follow-up for at least six weeks postnatally. These interventions have improved maternal health outcomes, reshaped national policy, and are an exemplar for approaches to postnatal care globally.

## 2. Underpinning Research

A positive experience of pregnancy, childbirth, and early motherhood is vital to the long term health and wellbeing of women, their children, and families, with wide ranging benefits for society. Yet, traditional maternity care has focused on preventing mortality, morbidity and acute illness, often overlooking broader aspects of maternal wellbeing. The MAMMI study was established in 2011 to address this gap by generating robust evidence on women's health during and after pregnancy. It is a large scale, multi site, multi strand longitudinal study examining the health of and health problems experienced by over 3,000 first-time mothers in Ireland. The study tracks a wide range of factors — sociodemographic characteristics, employment history, physical and mental health issues, sexual health issues and intimate partner violence (IPV) — through self completed surveys, maternity records (from consenting women), and in depth interviews on specific health issues. Data were collected at two time points during pregnancy and again at three, six, nine, and twelve months postpartum, after the birth of their second baby, and at five years after their first baby's birth, providing a comprehensive picture of maternal morbidity [R1].



From its inception, MAMMI was designed as a study **with and for** women, prioritising their voices in the research process. Through a formal Public and Patient Involvement (PPI) initiative, supported by the Health Service Executive, women actively contributed to shaping research priorities, study materials, and methodologies. Their input improved the acceptability and relevance of the research tools. In 2018, participants helped co-develop follow up study materials, with some continuing as long term collaborators, helping guide future research directions that reflect women's lived experiences and unmet needs [R2].

Findings from MAMMI have identified widespread and persistent issues affecting women during pregnancy and postnatally, including urinary incontinence, pelvic girdle pain, sexual health issues, and mental health concerns such as anxiety, depression, and stress [R3, R4, R5]. These issues are often exacerbated by societal stigma, and a systemic failure to address women's postpartum health as a priority leave women feeling alone and suffering in silence. The research calls for a paradigm shift in maternity care, advocating for an integrated, holistic approach that supports both the physical and emotional wellbeing of mothers [R6].

### Key outputs of the MAMMI study include:

- 1. WHAM (Women's Health After Motherhood)**, an accessible, evidence-based online course co-designed with women (in response to demand for accessible, evidenced-based, user friendly educational resources), available in English, Spanish [[www.futurelearn.com/courses/salud-de-la-mujer-en-el-postparto](https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/salud-de-la-mujer-en-el-postparto)] and Dutch [[www.futurelearn.com/courses/gezondheid-na-zwangerschap](https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/gezondheid-na-zwangerschap)].
- 2. Co-authored academic publications and public presentations with study participants**, amplifying women's voices in academic and policy discourse [R2].
- 3. Evidence demonstrating that postpartum care ends too soon, underpinning the creation of Ireland's first network of postnatal care hubs**, launched in 2022, offering at least six weeks of structured midwifery-led care postpartum [R3].

MAMMI's engaged research model and high quality longitudinal data have laid a solid foundation for national and international improvements in maternal health services and policy.

### 3. References to the Research

[R1] Hannon, S., Gartland, D., Higgins, A., Brown, S. J., Carroll, M., Begley, C., & Daly, D. (2022). Maternal mental health in the first year postpartum in a large Irish population cohort: The MAMMI study. *Archives of Women's Mental Health*, 25(3), 641-653. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00737-022-01231-x>

[R2] Daly, D., Moran, P., Wuytack, F., Hannon, S., Hannon, K., Martin, Y., Peoples, M., Begley, C., & Newnham, E. (2022). The maternal health-related issues that matter most to women in Ireland as they transition to motherhood - A qualitative study. *Women and Birth: Journal of the Australian College of Midwives*, 35(1), e10-e18. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wombi.2021.01.013>

[R3] Wuytack, F., Curtis, E., & Begley, C. (2015). The health-seeking behaviours of first-time mothers with persistent pelvic girdle pain after childbirth in Ireland: A descriptive qualitative study. *Midwifery*, 31(11), 1104-1109. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.midw.2015.07.009>

[R4] Daly, D., Higgins, A., Hannon, S., O'Malley, D., Wuytack, F., Moran, P., Cusack, C., & Begley, C. (2022). Trajectories of postpartum recovery: What is known and not known. *Clinical Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 65(3), 594-610. <https://doi.org/10.1097/grf.0000000000000726>

[R5] O'Malley, D., Higgins, A., Begley, C., Daly, D., & Smith, V. (2018). Prevalence of and risk factors associated with sexual health issues in primiparous women at 6 and 12 months postpartum; a longitudinal prospective cohort study (the MAMMI study). *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*, 18(1), 196-13. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-018-1838-6>

[R6] Hannon, S., Gartland, D., Higgins, A., Brown, S. J., Carroll, M., Begley, C., & Daly, D. (2023). Physical health and comorbid anxiety and depression across the first year postpartum in Ireland (MAMMI study): A longitudinal population-based study. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 328, 228-237. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2023.02.056>



### 4. Details of the Impact

#### Impact on Women's Health and Empowerment

The most direct and significant impact of the MAMMI study has been on women themselves. Over 3,000 first-time mothers participated in the study, with many reporting increased understanding of and confidence in managing their own health, and a new determination in seeking professional help, through access to MAMMI findings and resources [E1, E2].

The WHAM online course, co-designed with women in response to MAMMI findings, has reached over 14,000 users in 130 countries. It provides accessible, evidence-based guidance on postnatal health issues that are rarely addressed in routine care. WHAM has also fostered improved communication between women and healthcare providers, empowering users to seek support for conditions previously 'normalised' or dismissed, such as incontinence, pain, and postpartum mental health challenges, rated 4.8 out of 5 in the score system [E3].

## Impact on Healthcare Practice and Professional Training

In Ireland, WHAM has been adopted as part of national antenatal education and integrated into maternity care pathways in hospitals and primary care services. Midwives and healthcare professionals report using MAMMI-derived materials and findings in both clinical consultations and staff training [E4]. The impact on midwifery more broadly is evident with the 19 maternity hospitals and maternity services in Ireland using the MAMMI's resources to complement their services [E5].

MAMMI data has informed the development and implementation of Ireland's first national network of postnatal care hubs, launched in 2022, providing structured, midwifery-led follow-up for at least six weeks after birth, with referral to the wider multidisciplinary team when required. These hubs respond directly to women's identified needs for extended postnatal care and have been cited in national maternity service planning [E6].

## Impact on Policy and System-Level Change

MAMMI's identification of long-ignored maternal health issues has shaped Irish maternity policy by highlighting gaps in postnatal care and placing women's lived experiences at the centre of reform. Its influence is visible in national strategies aimed at improving maternal health outcomes and service delivery beyond the six-week postpartum window [E7, E8].

Through extensive dissemination, including media appearances, policy briefings, and co-presentations by women participants, the study has contributed to shifting public discourse on postpartum health, challenging societal silence around maternal morbidity and reinforcing the need for systemic change [E9, E10].

## Impact on Research Culture and Participation

MAMMI has become a model of participatory health research. Its PPI framework, established early in the study, has led to women co-authoring peer-reviewed articles and co-developing new research tools. This has helped reframe women not just as 'subjects' of research, but as collaborators in generating knowledge and shaping future studies.

This shift in approach has influenced broader research practices in women's health in Ireland and could serve as a model internationally for studies seeking to centre service users in research and healthcare transformation.

## 5. Sources to Corroborate the Impact

- [E1] <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/health-family/parenting/messages-for-new-mothers-help-is-at-hand-1.4052596>
- [E2] <https://www.thejournal.ie/new-mothers-health-issues-4852938-Oct2019/>
- [E3] <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/womens-health-after-motherhood>
- [E4] <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/acute-hospitals-division/woman-infants/national-reports-on-womens-health/antenatal-education-resource-guide-for-parent-educators.pdf>
- [E5] <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/2/primarycare/national-phn-service/>
- [E6] <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-health/press-releases/minister-for-health-announces-budget-2025-investment-for-the-national-maternity-strategy-2016-2025/>
- [E7] [https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/Womens\\_Health\\_in\\_Ireland\\_-\\_Evidence\\_Base\\_for\\_the\\_Development\\_of\\_the\\_WHAP\\_-\\_2019.pdf](https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/Womens_Health_in_Ireland_-_Evidence_Base_for_the_Development_of_the_WHAP_-_2019.pdf)
- [E8] [https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/NWC\\_Perinatal\\_Mental\\_Health\\_Final.pdf](https://www.nwci.ie/images/uploads/NWC_Perinatal_Mental_Health_Final.pdf)
- [E9] <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/inter-parliamentary-work/northsouth/>
- [E10] <https://www.independent.ie/news/first-time-mothers-suffer-undiagnosed-and-untreated-health-issues/35196817.html>