

The results of the study do not give happy pills a big smile, however. It's suspected that in some cases they can have a damaging effect on a foetus, including heart defects.

Stephansson thinks it's a good idea to use as small dosages as possible.

But if a woman is in a state of depression during her pregnancy and isn't treated for it, that too can be a health hazard for both mother and child.

Only possible in Nordic countries

Researchers from all Nordic countries participated in the study. It's the largest study of pregnancies and SSRIs ever conducted.

"Such studies are only possible in the Nordic countries," says Stephansson.

Extensive public records and the fact that everyone has a National Insurance identity number makes the Nordic population a treasure chest for health studies requiring large amounts of data.

The results of the study have been correlated against risk factors among pregnant women such as smoking, high blood pressure and previous hospitalisations for mental illness.

Miscarriages not included

The study covers medications prescribed up to three months before the start of a pregnancy. However, it doesn't include the risk of a miscarriage in the first weeks of pregnancy.

Among the 1.6 million pregnancies in the Nordic countries, there were 6,000 stillbirths, 3,600 new-born infants died and another 1,600 died during their first year. A stillbirth is defined as a prenatal death after 22 or 28 weeks of pregnancy.

The researchers make one reservation ? they might have overestimated the actual use of antidepressants, because being prescribed a drug doesn't always equate to actually using it.

But the results tally well against a Norwegian study last year which was based on less data.

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 [Up to 19 percent of pregnant women are depressed. \(Photo: Colourbox\)](#) [7]

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[Olof Stephansson et al: Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors During Pregnancy and Risk of Stillbirth and Infant Mortality, JAMA 2. januar 2013.](#) [12]

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Glenn Ostling

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Links:

- [1] <http://sciencenordic.com/category/section/health>
- [2] <http://sciencenordic.com/mental-health>
- [3] <http://sciencenordic.com/pregnancy>
- [4] <http://sciencenordic.com/category/countries/sweden>
- [5] <http://sciencenordic.com/category/publisher/forskningno>
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- [8] http://sciencenordic.com/sites/default/files/gravid2_1.jpg
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