"Bad" Mothers: the impact of pregnancy and parenting mobile applications on motherhood

Elise Racine
Department of International Development

Today, most of us use mobile applications to track every detail of our lives – from how much we sleep to what we eat to how many steps we take. Pregnancy and parenthood are no exception, as we monitor everything from when we ovulate to our children's developmental milestones.

New research, however, has found that pregnancy and parenting apps are not as innocuous as they seem. Rather, as technologies of power that extend into new spaces, these applications are reshaping standards around motherhood and leading to new forms of self-discipline.

Due to the portability of mobile devices, pregnancy and parenting apps are readily accessible and easily integrated into all aspects of modern life. Push notifications take this integration even farther, addressing information at users rather than having them seek it out. Consequently, women can constantly be made aware of their roles as mothers and encouraged to evaluate themselves according to social, cultural, and medical norms.

As these digital technologies offer additional opportunities to optimise child outcomes, maternal subjects may be regarded as selfish for not doing so and, therefore, accept surveillance and medicalisation.

Ultimately, pregnancy and parenting apps are redefining what it means to be a "bad" mother. Using secondary data, surveys, and interviews, this research provides critical insight into how these technological advancements perpetuate not only repressive expectations of maternal perfection and self-sacrifice, but discourses that fail to recognise the impact of poverty and inequality in meeting such expectations. Such analysis is necessary to tackle these challenges moving forward.

EXHIBIT
31