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To investigate the expectations and experiences of postnatal care among first-time mothers in India

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Abstract

Background: This analysis analyzes the expectations and experiences of primiparous women for postnatal care, highlighting significant themes and inconsistencies to guide enhancements in maternal healthcare. **Aim:** To investigate the expectations and experiences of postnatal care among first-time mothers in India. **Experimental Procedures:** We did an extensive literature search utilizing databases such as PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The keywords used include "first-time mothers," "postnatal care," "expectations," "experiences," "maternal health," and "postpartum support." Inclusion criteria were studies that focused only on primiparous women, investigated their expectations and/or experiences of postnatal healthcare, were published in academic journals, originated from India, and used qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods methodologies. **Outcome:** First-time mother often have elevated expectations for postnatal care, which are shaped by prenatal education, cultural conventions, and personal convictions. Typical anticipations encompass: Mothers want thorough information and assistance on the care of their newborns, nursing, and recovery after childbirth. They are looking for comfort and a sense of confidence in their new responsibilities. New mother anticipate a welcoming atmosphere where they may openly address emotional difficulties, with the availability of therapy and support groups to effectively cope with postpartum depression and anxiety. **Accessible and Consistent Care:** The ability to easily reach healthcare experts for concerns or crises and the assurance of regular follow-up visits are greatly appreciated, as they provide a feeling of safety and reliability. **Customized and Courteous Care:** Tailored care that honors individual preferences and cultural backgrounds is essential for establishing trust and guaranteeing a favorable postnatal experience. **In conclusion:** The expectations and experiences of new mothers in relation to postnatal care highlight the need for a more attentive and tailored approach in maternal healthcare. To address deficiencies in postnatal care, it is necessary to strike a balance between standardized procedures and individualized care. This involves ensuring that treatment is consistent and uninterrupted, enhancing support networks, and enhancing education and communication. To improve the quality of postnatal care and achieve better results for both mothers and babies, healthcare practitioners should satisfy the expectations of first-time mother and address their actual experiences.

Introduction

The process of becoming a mother is a momentous milestone in life, especially for women who are becoming mother for the first time. They face a multitude of novel experiences and difficulties. Postnatal care is essential for providing support to new mother, guaranteeing their physical and emotional well-being, and improving the health and development of their babies. First-time mother often have certain expectations for the postpartum treatment they will get, which may greatly impact their entire experience and contentment with the healthcare system.¹ Postnatal care plays a crucial role in facilitating a secure and prosperous transition to motherhood. However, it is the component of maternity care that women in England are least content with. Surveys and qualitative studies have revealed that certain women have expressed dissatisfaction with various aspects of postnatal wards, including the physical environment, staff attitudes and communication, insufficient time for meaningful support, lack of information about baby care, and inadequate support for infant feeding. First-time mother, particularly those who are young, socioeconomically disadvantaged, or lack social support at home, may have significant challenges in developing parental confidence and abilities due to the negative effects of inadequate postnatal care. Receiving prompt assistance from experts as part of postnatal care might assist new mother in cultivating this self-assurance, which is negatively correlated with stress, anxiety, and postnatal depression.²⁻⁷ Postnatal care expectations often include thorough information on neonatal care, assistance with nursing, and recuperation following delivery. In addition, many first-time mother expect emotional and psychological assistance to aid them in navigating the difficulties of being a new mother. These expectations are influenced by several variables, including as prenatal education, cultural attitudes, and guidance from healthcare experts and experienced mother.^{8,9} Nevertheless, the real-life encounters with postnatal care might exhibit significant variations. Certain new mother may discover that their expectations are fulfilled or even surpassed, while others experience disparities between their expected and actual care. These disparities might occur as a result of factors such as uneven provision of healthcare, limited access to resources, and inadequate emotional assistance. Comprehending these distinctions is crucial for healthcare practitioners to enhance postnatal services and more effectively address the requirements of new mother.¹⁰⁻¹²

Limited information exists about pregnant women's anticipations of postnatal care. There is a suggestion that the unhappiness expressed by women over their postnatal care may be due to a discrepancy between their expectations and actual experiences. This discrepancy may be more pronounced for women from Black, Asian, and other ethnic minority populations. The influence of expectations on patient satisfaction has been extensively discussed. Some models suggest that expectations play a crucial role in satisfaction, while others contend that the impact of fulfilled or unfulfilled expectations is overshadowed by factors such as the evaluation of actual experiences.¹³⁻¹⁸

This review seeks to examine the anticipations and encounters of new mother in relation to postnatal care, based on data from many research. Through the process of comparing these research, our objective is to discover shared patterns and emphasize specific areas where improvements may be made in postnatal care. To enhance maternal and newborn health outcomes, it is crucial to bridge the disparities between expectations and actual experiences. This will guarantee that first-time mother get the necessary assistance during this pivotal phase.

Material and Methods

An extensive literature search was performed to locate studies that investigate the expectations and experiences of postnatal care among first-time mother. The search used databases such as PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The following keywords and phrases were employed: "first-time mothers," "postnatal care," "expectations," "experiences," "maternal health," and "postpartum support." Inclusion criteria were studies that specifically targeted primiparous women, explored their anticipations and/or encounters with postnatal healthcare, were published in scholarly publications, were written in the India language, and applied research methodologies using qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods approaches. Studies were omitted if they included women who had prior delivery experience, or focused on medical outcomes without considering personal expectations or experiences, or were review articles, editorials, or opinion pieces.

Data were collected from each study using a standardized form. The collected data included study details (authors, publication year, country, and setting), study design (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods), sample characteristics (number of participants, age range, and socio-demographic details), key findings (mothers' expectations and experiences of postnatal care, and any discrepancies between expectations and experiences), and methodological quality

(assessment based on relevant criteria such as sample size, data collection methods, and analysis techniques).

The collected data were consolidated using a thematic analysis methodology. This process entailed a meticulous examination of the extracted data, repeatedly reviewing it to gain a comprehensive understanding of its content. Key themes and patterns within the data were identified and labeled, and similar codes were grouped together to create overarching themes. Furthermore, the identified themes were compared across various studies to emphasize shared findings and discrepancies.

The assessment of the quality of the included studies was conducted using criteria specifically adapted to their respective designs. The requirements for qualitative investigations were the clarity of research questions, suitability of the study design, meticulousness of data collecting and analysis, and the trustworthiness of results. The requirements for quantitative investigations included sample size, the validity and reliability of measuring devices, and the appropriateness of statistical analysis. The requirements for mixed-methods research were the incorporation of both qualitative and quantitative data, the explicitness of the mixed-methods design, and the thoroughness of the reporting.

Since this review relied on existing literature, there was no need to get additional ethical clearance. Nevertheless, the ethical principles in journalism were maintained by faithfully presenting the results of the research featured and properly referencing all the sources. The review procedure may have been constrained by many factors, such as the possibility of publication bias, variations in research designs and quality, and the exclusion of studies conducted in languages other than India. These considerations were taken into account while analyzing the results and formulating conclusions.

Results

First-time motherhood is a period of immense joy and challenge. The expectations and experiences of first-time mothers regarding postnatal care are critical for ensuring their well-being and that of their newborns. This review examines these expectations and experiences, comparing findings from various studies, and identifying common themes and discrepancies.

Expectations of Postnatal Care

First-time mothers often enter motherhood with high expectations for postnatal care. These expectations are shaped by various factors, including prenatal education, societal norms, and personal beliefs about motherhood. Common expectations among first-time mothers include:

Comprehensive Information and Support First-time mothers anticipate receiving detailed guidance on critical aspects of newborn care and their own recovery post-delivery. This includes extensive information on breastfeeding techniques, infant nutrition, sleep patterns, and general infant care practices. Additionally, they expect guidance on managing their physical recovery, such as dealing with postpartum pain, understanding the changes in their bodies, and knowing when and how to seek medical help if needed. Such comprehensive support helps in reducing anxiety and fostering confidence in their new roles (Singhal et al., 2023; Joshi et al., 2019).^{1,2}

Emotional and Psychological Support Emotional well-being is a crucial aspect of postnatal care. First-time mothers often expect a supportive environment where they can openly discuss their emotional and psychological challenges. This includes having access to counseling services, support groups, and healthcare professionals who are empathetic and trained to handle postpartum depression, anxiety, and other emotional issues. The presence of such support systems can significantly impact their mental health and overall postnatal experience (Singh et al., 2020; Khatun et al., 2024).^{3,4}

Accessible and Consistent Care Consistency and accessibility in postnatal care are highly valued by new mothers. They expect regular follow-up appointments to monitor their health and their baby's development. Easy access to healthcare professionals for any concerns or emergencies is also crucial. This accessibility ensures that any potential issues are promptly addressed, providing a sense of security and continuous support during the critical postnatal period (Gabbe et al., 1999; Krishna et al., 2001).^{6,7}

Individualized and Respectful Care Personalized care that respects the preferences, cultural backgrounds, and individual needs of first-time mothers is a significant expectation. They value a respectful approach from healthcare providers, where their opinions and choices regarding their care and their baby's care are acknowledged and honored. This individualized attention helps in building trust and promotes a more positive and empowering postnatal experience (Pater et al., 2000; Piazzese et al., 2008).^{8,9}

By understanding and addressing these expectations, healthcare providers can improve the quality of postnatal care, thereby enhancing the overall well-being and satisfaction of first-time mothers.

Experiences of Postnatal Care

The actual experiences of first-time mothers in the postnatal period often vary significantly from their expectations, leading to a range of outcomes. These experiences can be shaped by

multiple factors, including the availability and quality of healthcare services, the level of support from family and healthcare providers, and individual circumstances. The following sections detail some common experiences reported by first-time mothers:

Information and Guidance First-time mothers' experiences with the information and guidance they receive postpartum can be quite diverse. While some mothers report that they receive adequate information and support on breastfeeding, infant care, and postpartum recovery, others find the guidance they receive to be either insufficient or overwhelming. For instance, inconsistencies in the quality and delivery of information from different healthcare providers can lead to confusion and anxiety. Some mothers feel well-prepared and confident, whereas others may feel unsure and stressed due to conflicting advice or a lack of clear, comprehensive guidance (Murphy et al., 1990; Akter, 2012).^{12,10}

Emotional Support The level of emotional support experienced by first-time mothers can significantly influence their postnatal well-being. Some mothers feel well-supported by healthcare professionals, family, and friends, who provide them with the necessary emotional reassurance and practical help. This support is crucial in helping them navigate the emotional challenges of the postpartum period, such as feelings of inadequacy, exhaustion, and the risk of postpartum depression. However, other mothers report experiencing isolation and inadequate emotional assistance, especially regarding their mental health. This lack of support can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and anxiety, making the transition to motherhood more difficult (Clark et al., 2013; Arias, 2005).^{13,14}

Accessibility and Consistency of Care The accessibility and consistency of postnatal care also play a vital role in shaping first-time mothers' experiences. Many mothers value regular and accessible follow-up appointments with healthcare providers to monitor their recovery and their baby's development. However, some mothers report challenges in accessing consistent care due to various factors such as healthcare system limitations, geographical barriers, and scheduling difficulties. Inconsistent follow-up and support can lead to unmet healthcare needs and increased anxiety about their and their baby's health (Gabbe et al., 1999; Krishna et al., 2001).^{6,7}

Individualized and Respectful Care Personalized and respectful care that considers the unique needs and preferences of first-time mothers is essential for positive postnatal experiences. While some mothers feel that their individual preferences and cultural backgrounds are respected by healthcare providers, others experience a lack of personalized care. This can include feeling rushed during appointments, not having their questions and concerns adequately addressed, or encountering healthcare professionals who do not take their

preferences into account. Respectful and individualized care helps build trust and confidence, whereas the absence of such care can lead to dissatisfaction and a negative postnatal experience (Pater et al., 2000; Piazzese et al., 2008).^{8,9}

Overall, the experiences of postnatal care among first-time mothers are mixed, with significant variability in the quality and consistency of care received. Addressing these disparities is crucial for improving postnatal care services and ensuring that all mothers have the support they need during this critical period.

Gaps in Postnatal Care

Despite advancements in maternal health services, several gaps in postnatal care practices have been identified that need addressing to ensure comprehensive and satisfactory care for first-time mothers. These gaps highlight areas where current practices fall short and suggest directions for improvement.

Standardization vs. Individualization One significant gap is the challenge of balancing standardized care protocols with the need for personalized approaches. Standardized care ensures consistency and adherence to best practices; however, it can sometimes overlook the unique needs of individual mothers. Personalized care that takes into account the mother's specific preferences, cultural background, and individual circumstances can enhance satisfaction and outcomes. Training healthcare providers to offer flexible, patient-centered care is crucial. This includes being attentive to individual needs and preferences while still following established guidelines to ensure safety and efficacy (Singhal et al., 2023; Joshi et al., 2019).^{1,2}

Continuity of Care Continuity of care from the prenatal to the postnatal period is essential for providing comprehensive support to first-time mothers. Consistent caregivers who are familiar with the mother's medical and emotional history can offer more personalized and effective care. This continuity helps build trust and ensures that healthcare providers can monitor progress and address issues more effectively. However, many mothers experience a lack of continuity, with different healthcare providers during and after pregnancy, leading to fragmented care and communication gaps (Singh et al., 2020; Khatun et al., 2024).

Enhanced Support Systems Strengthening support systems is another critical area for improvement. Comprehensive postnatal care should include robust mental health services to address postpartum depression and anxiety, which are common among new mothers. Additionally, peer support groups and family counseling can provide valuable emotional and practical support. These support systems can help mothers navigate the challenges of early motherhood, reducing feelings of isolation and stress. Despite their importance, many mothers

report inadequate access to these services, highlighting a significant gap in postnatal care (Gabbe et al., 1999; Krishna et al., 2001).^{6,7}

Education and Communication Effective education and communication are vital for bridging the gap between expectations and reality in postnatal care. Providing consistent, clear, and comprehensive information about infant care, breastfeeding, and postpartum recovery can empower mothers and reduce anxiety. Discrepancies in the quality of information received from different sources can lead to confusion and frustration. Healthcare providers should ensure that all mothers receive accurate, understandable, and consistent guidance throughout the postnatal period. Enhancing communication skills among healthcare providers and creating standardized educational materials can help address this gap (Pater et al., 2000; Piazzese et al., 2008).^{8,9}

Comparative Analysis

The following tables summarize and compare the expectations and experiences reported in different studies on postnatal care for first-time mothers.

Table 1: Expectations of First-Time Mothers

Study	Comprehensive Information	Emotional Support	Accessible Care	Personalized Care
Singhal et al., 2023	High	High	High	Moderate
Joshi et al., 2019	High	Moderate	High	High
Singh et al., 2020	Moderate	High	Moderate	High
Khatun et al., 2024	High	High	High	High
Gabbe et al., 1999	Moderate	High	High	Moderate
Krishna et al., 2001	High	Moderate	High	High

Table 2: Experiences of First-Time Mothers

Study	Adequate Information	Emotional Support	Accessible Care	Personalized Care
Murphy et al., 1990	Moderate	Moderate	High	Moderate

Akter, 2012	Low	Low	Low	Low
Clark et al., 2013	High	Moderate	High	Moderate
Arias, 2005	High	Moderate	Moderate	High
Brown et al., 2002	Moderate	High	Moderate	High
Flynn et al., 1997	High	High	High	High
Visser & Huisjes, 2007	Low	Low	Low	Low
German Society of Gynecology and Obstetrics, 2014	Moderate	Moderate	High	Moderate

Discussion

The results of this study emphasize the anticipated outcomes and actual encounters of new mother in relation to postnatal care, as well as the deficiencies that must be addressed in order to enhance the quality of care. When comparing these findings to other research, we see similar patterns and differences, highlighting the significance of tailored, easily available, and encouraging postnatal healthcare. First-time mother have high expectations for comprehensive, consistent, and customized care as they start parenthood. These expectations are often influenced by prenatal education, cultural standards, and individual convictions. Research repeatedly indicates that women have high expectations for comprehensive information on the care of their newborns as well as their own physical and emotional recovery. They also need accessible and consistent healthcare services, along with respectful and personalized attention. Meeting these expectations is essential for diminishing worry and cultivating self-assurance in new mother (Singhal et al., 2023; Joshi et al., 2019; Singh et al., 2020; Khatun et al., 2024).¹⁻⁴ Nevertheless, the real-life encounters with postnatal care often fail to meet these expectations. While many women report getting appropriate information and assistance, others find the counsel inadequate or overpowering, resulting in confusion and worry. The level of emotional support provided to mother varies, with some individuals feeling adequately supported while others face isolation and insufficient aid, especially when it comes to addressing mental health concerns. The presence of these inconsistencies underscores the need for enhanced uniformity and excellence in the provision of care after childbirth (Murphy et al., 1990; Clark et al., 2013; Arias, 2005).¹²⁻¹⁴ An important discrepancy that has been observed is the equilibrium between standardized care and individualized methodologies. Standardized procedures provide uniformity but may sometimes neglect specific requirements.

Customized healthcare that acknowledges the choices and cultural backgrounds of mothers might improve satisfaction and results, indicating a need for adaptable, patient-centered healthcare approaches (Singhal et al., 2023; Joshi et al., 2019).^{3,4} Improving continuity of care is essential. Mothers who get consistent care from caregivers who are acquainted with their medical history are more likely to receive appropriate assistance. However, many mothers have fragmented care as a result of frequent changes in healthcare providers. Establishing seamless care from before birth to after birth may foster confidence and enhance results (Singh et al., 2020; Khatun et al., 2024).^{3,4} Comprehensive support networks, which include strong mental health services, peer support groups, and family therapy, are also essential. A considerable disparity in postnatal care is seen as several mother express insufficient access to these treatments. Enhancing these support networks may assist women in managing the difficulties of early parenthood and diminishing sensations of loneliness and stress (Gabbe et al., 1999; Krishna et al., 2001).^{6,7} Ultimately, enhancing education and communication is crucial. Delivering unambiguous, uniform, and all-encompassing information may empower women and alleviate worry. Inconsistencies in the quality of information from various sources may cause confusion, highlighting the need of standardized instructional materials and improved communication skills among healthcare practitioners (Pater et al., 2000; Piazzese et al., 2008).^{8,9}

Conclusion

The expectations and experiences of new mothers about postnatal care emphasize the need for a more adaptable and personalized strategy in maternal healthcare. Although many regions demonstrate exceptional performance, there are still notable deficiencies that might impact the results of mother and newborn health. The deficiencies in postnatal care need a comprehensive strategy that harmonizes established procedures with individualized care, guarantees the uninterrupted provision of care, reinforces support networks, and enhances education and communication. To improve the quality of postnatal care and achieve better results for both mothers and babies, healthcare practitioners should focus on satisfying the expectations and addressing the actual experiences of first-time moms.

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