



"Listening to Mothers' Voices: Exploring Perceptions of Postnatal Nursing Support and Its Impact on Maternal Well-Being"

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Date of publication: 17/01/2024

DOI 10.5281/zenodo.18007163

Abstract: The postnatal period is a critical phase in the continuum of maternal and newborn care, marked by significant physical, psychological, and social adjustments for mothers. During this vulnerable transition, postnatal nursing support plays a pivotal role in promoting maternal confidence, facilitating recovery, and ensuring optimal neonatal outcomes. Mothers' perceptions of the care they receive are increasingly recognized as a key indicator of quality in postnatal services. Positive perceptions are associated with improved maternal satisfaction, enhanced breastfeeding practices, and better emotional well-being, whereas negative experiences may contribute to anxiety, stress, and disengagement from health services. This review article explores existing literature on mothers' perceptions of postnatal nursing support, examining the dimensions of care that influence these perceptions, including emotional support, communication, education, cultural sensitivity, continuity of care, and accessibility of services. Factors affecting maternal perceptions, such as socio-demographic characteristics, healthcare settings, and nurse competencies, are critically analyzed. The article also discusses challenges faced by postnatal nurses and highlights evidence-based strategies to enhance the quality of postnatal nursing support. Understanding mothers' perspectives is essential for strengthening postnatal care services and ensuring mother-centered, respectful, and holistic nursing practice.

Keywords: Postnatal care, maternal perceptions, nursing support, postpartum period, maternal satisfaction, breastfeeding support, continuity of care

Introduction

The postnatal or postpartum period, typically defined as the first six weeks following childbirth, is a crucial stage for both mother and newborn. During this time, women undergo profound physiological changes as their bodies recover from pregnancy and childbirth, alongside psychological adjustments related to motherhood and infant care. The quality of care received during this period has long-term implications for maternal health, infant development, and family well-being. Postnatal nursing support serves as a cornerstone in ensuring a smooth transition from hospital to home and in addressing the complex needs of new mothers. Globally, maternal healthcare has traditionally focused more heavily on antenatal and intrapartum care, often leaving postnatal services underemphasized. However, emerging evidence highlights that many maternal complications, including postpartum depression, breastfeeding difficulties,

infections, and delayed recovery, occur during the postnatal period. In this context, nurses play a vital role in monitoring maternal and neonatal health, providing education, offering emotional reassurance, and facilitating early detection of complications. Mothers' perceptions of these nursing interventions significantly influence their engagement with care services and adherence to recommended practices.

Perceptions are shaped not only by clinical competence but also by interpersonal interactions, respect, empathy, and responsiveness to individual needs. Understanding how mothers perceive postnatal nursing support provides valuable insights into the effectiveness of current care models and helps identify gaps in service delivery. This review aims to synthesize existing literature on maternal perceptions of postnatal nursing support and to examine how these perceptions affect maternal outcomes and satisfaction with care.



Concept of Postnatal Nursing Support

Postnatal nursing support encompasses a wide range of interventions designed to promote the health and well-being of mothers and newborns after childbirth. It includes physical assessment, emotional support, health education, counseling, and coordination of care across healthcare settings. Nurses are often the primary healthcare professionals interacting with mothers during the immediate postpartum period, placing them in a unique position to influence maternal experiences.

The scope of postnatal nursing support extends beyond routine clinical care. It involves assisting mothers with breastfeeding initiation, managing pain and discomfort, providing guidance on newborn care, addressing concerns related to sleep and fatigue, and offering psychological support during emotional transitions. Effective postnatal nursing support is holistic, individualized, and culturally sensitive, recognizing that each mother's experience of childbirth and motherhood is unique.

From a maternal perspective, postnatal nursing support is often evaluated based on how supported, informed, and respected they feel during interactions with nurses. Mothers value care that is compassionate, responsive, and tailored to their personal circumstances. When nursing support aligns with mothers' expectations and needs, it fosters trust and confidence in healthcare services.

Importance of Mothers' Perceptions in Postnatal Care

Mothers' perceptions of postnatal nursing support are increasingly acknowledged as an essential indicator of quality in maternal healthcare. Perception reflects not only the technical aspects of care but also the emotional and relational dimensions of nursing practice. Positive perceptions are associated with higher levels of maternal satisfaction, improved mental health outcomes, and increased utilization of postnatal services.

Negative perceptions, on the other hand, may discourage mothers from seeking help, particularly for sensitive issues such as mental health concerns or breastfeeding difficulties. Women who perceive postnatal care as inadequate or disrespectful may feel isolated, undervalued, or

overwhelmed, increasing their vulnerability to postpartum depression and anxiety. Therefore, assessing maternal perceptions provides a valuable lens through which the effectiveness of postnatal nursing support can be evaluated. Moreover, maternal perceptions are closely linked to concepts such as respectful maternity care and patient-centered care. Listening to mothers' voices helps healthcare systems move beyond task-oriented approaches toward more compassionate and collaborative models of care. Incorporating maternal feedback into service planning and evaluation is essential for improving the quality and acceptability of postnatal nursing services.

Dimensions of Postnatal Nursing Support Influencing Maternal Perceptions

Emotional and Psychological Support

Emotional support is one of the most valued components of postnatal nursing care from the mothers' perspective. The postpartum period is often accompanied by emotional vulnerability, mood fluctuations, and feelings of uncertainty. Nurses who provide reassurance, active listening, and empathy help mothers feel understood and supported during this transition.

Studies consistently show that mothers appreciate nurses who acknowledge their emotions, validate their concerns, and provide a non-judgmental environment. Emotional support fosters maternal confidence, reduces anxiety, and enhances coping mechanisms. Conversely, lack of emotional sensitivity or dismissive attitudes can negatively impact mothers' perceptions and overall satisfaction with care.

Communication and Interpersonal Relationships

Effective communication is central to positive maternal perceptions of postnatal nursing support. Clear, respectful, and timely communication enables mothers to understand their health status, newborn needs, and self-care practices. Mothers value nurses who take time to explain procedures, answer questions patiently, and encourage open dialogue. Interpersonal relationships built on trust and mutual respect significantly influence maternal experiences. When nurses engage in meaningful interactions and demonstrate genuine concern, mothers are more likely to perceive care as



supportive and empowering. Poor communication, rushed interactions, or inconsistent information can lead to confusion and dissatisfaction.

Health Education and Information Provision

Education is a fundamental aspect of postnatal nursing support, particularly regarding breastfeeding, newborn care, maternal nutrition, hygiene, and family planning. Mothers often rely heavily on nurses for accurate and practical information during the postpartum period. The manner in which education is delivered plays a crucial role in shaping maternal perceptions.

Mothers prefer education that is individualized, practical, and reinforced through demonstrations and written materials. Nurses who assess mothers' learning needs and adapt information accordingly are more likely to be perceived positively. Inadequate or overly technical explanations may overwhelm mothers and reduce the perceived usefulness of nursing support.

Breastfeeding Support

Breastfeeding support is a key determinant of maternal satisfaction with postnatal nursing care. Many mothers encounter challenges related to latching, milk supply, and nipple pain, especially in the early postpartum days. Nurses who provide hands-on assistance, encouragement, and evidence-based guidance significantly influence mothers' confidence in breastfeeding.

Positive breastfeeding experiences are strongly linked to supportive nursing care, while lack of assistance or conflicting advice can lead to early discontinuation of breastfeeding. Mothers often perceive breastfeeding support as a reflection of the overall quality of postnatal care.

Continuity and Accessibility of Care

Continuity of care, including consistent nursing personnel and follow-up services, is highly valued by mothers. Familiarity with care providers enhances trust and allows nurses to better understand individual needs. Postnatal home visits and community-based nursing services further contribute to positive maternal perceptions by providing ongoing support beyond hospital discharge.

Accessibility of nursing support, particularly for first-time mothers, is crucial. Mothers appreciate having opportunities

to seek advice and reassurance when needed. Limited access to postnatal services or early discharge without adequate follow-up may negatively affect maternal perceptions.

Cultural Sensitivity and Respect

Cultural beliefs and practices significantly influence maternal expectations and experiences of postnatal care. Nurses who demonstrate cultural sensitivity and respect for traditional practices are more likely to be perceived positively by mothers. Understanding cultural norms related to childbirth, diet, infant care, and family roles helps nurses provide individualized and respectful care.

Failure to acknowledge cultural preferences or imposing rigid care practices can lead to dissatisfaction and feelings of disrespect. Culturally competent nursing care promotes inclusivity and enhances maternal trust in healthcare services.

Factors Influencing Mothers' Perceptions of Postnatal Nursing Support

Maternal perceptions are shaped by a combination of individual, social, and healthcare system factors. Socio-demographic characteristics such as age, education, parity, and socioeconomic status influence expectations and evaluation of care. First-time mothers, for example, often require more guidance and reassurance and may have higher expectations of nursing support.

Healthcare settings also play a significant role. Mothers receiving care in well-resourced facilities with adequate nurse staffing tend to report more positive experiences. Conversely, high patient workloads, time constraints, and limited resources may compromise the quality of nursing interactions and negatively impact perceptions.

Nurse-related factors, including professional competence, attitude, communication skills, and workload, are critical determinants of maternal perceptions. Nurses who are well-trained, motivated, and supported by their institutions are better equipped to provide high-quality postnatal care.

Challenges in Providing Effective Postnatal Nursing Support



Despite the recognized importance of postnatal nursing support, several challenges hinder its effective delivery. Staffing shortages, increased patient turnover, and early discharge policies often limit the time nurses can spend with each mother. These constraints may reduce opportunities for individualized care and meaningful interactions.

Additionally, inadequate training in communication skills, mental health assessment, and cultural competence may affect nurses' ability to address mothers' holistic needs. Systemic issues such as fragmented care and lack of coordination between hospital and community services further complicate postnatal support.

Strategies to Enhance Mothers' Perceptions of Postnatal Nursing Support

Improving mothers' perceptions requires a multifaceted approach that prioritizes mother-centered care. Strengthening nurse education and training in interpersonal communication, emotional support, and cultural competence is essential. Implementing structured postnatal education programs and standardized breastfeeding support protocols can enhance consistency and quality of care.

Promoting continuity of care through postnatal follow-up visits, community nursing services, and telehealth interventions can address gaps in support after discharge. Encouraging maternal feedback and involving mothers in care planning fosters empowerment and responsiveness within healthcare systems.

Institutional support, including adequate staffing, supportive work environments, and policies that prioritize postnatal care, is crucial for enabling nurses to provide high-quality support. By addressing both individual and systemic factors, healthcare systems can improve maternal experiences and outcomes.

Implications for Nursing Practice, Education, and Research

Understanding mothers' perceptions of postnatal nursing support has significant implications for nursing practice and education. Integrating maternal feedback into quality improvement initiatives can enhance the responsiveness and

effectiveness of postnatal services. Nursing curricula should emphasize holistic, respectful, and culturally sensitive postnatal care to prepare future nurses for diverse maternal needs.

Further research is needed to explore maternal perceptions across different cultural and healthcare contexts and to evaluate innovative models of postnatal nursing support. Qualitative studies, in particular, can provide deeper insights into mothers' lived experiences and expectations.

Conclusion

Mothers' perceptions of postnatal nursing support are a critical determinant of maternal satisfaction, well-being, and engagement with healthcare services. Postnatal nursing support that is emotionally supportive, communicative, educational, and culturally sensitive fosters positive maternal experiences and contributes to improved maternal and neonatal outcomes. By listening to mothers' voices and addressing the factors that shape their perceptions, nurses and healthcare systems can enhance the quality of postnatal care. Strengthening postnatal nursing support is essential for promoting a positive transition to motherhood and ensuring holistic, mother-centered care.

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zenodo



www.scientificjournal.in YEAR: 2024 VOLUME: 2 ISSUE: 1 ISSN: 3107-4162

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