



## Role Of Social Support As A Key Factor To Promote Maternal Confidence In First Time Mothers

S. Kalyani<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr.C.N.Ram Gopal<sup>2</sup>, Rasagna Reddy<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup>Research Scholar, Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, Chettinad Hospital and research Institute, Chettinad Academy of Research and Education Kelambakkam-603103, Tamil Nadu, India

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, Chettinad Hospital and research Institute, Chettinad Academy of Research and Education Kelambakkam-603103, Tamil Nadu, India

<sup>3</sup>Research Scholar, Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, Chettinad Hospital and research Institute, Chettinad Academy of Research and Education Kelambakkam-603103, Tamil Nadu, India

**\*Corresponding Author:** S. Kalyani

\*Research Scholar, Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, Chettinad Hospital and research Institute, Chettinad Academy of Research and Education Kelambakkam-603103, Tamil Nadu, India, Email: ping.kalyani@gmail.com

### Abstract

Transition to motherhood is a joyful and exciting phase combined with moments of emotional ups and downs, fatigue and exhaustion. Lack of support during the transition phase, can lead to the onset of postnatal psychological distress especially in first time mothers. The objective of this article is to highlight the importance, role, and impact of social support to prevent distress and promote wellbeing in first time mothers. Articles have been selected and screened from various academic databases like Scopus, PubMed, PsycINFO, and Web of Science. The results of the review indicate that emotional and appraisal support have a significant association in promoting wellbeing and preventing distress. Mothers experience lower levels of distress and improved wellbeing when they receive social support. It is recommended that tailor made interventions based on the knowledge, skills and techniques relevant to the postpartum mothers need to be curated and delivered to empower new mothers.

Key words: social support, first time mothers, postnatal distress, maternal confidence

### Introduction

The process of becoming a mother is an incredible phase where the mother experiences a plethora of emotional states like being happy, fatigue, exhaustion, fulfilment and frustration. Emotional distress can have adverse impact on the mother and also on the infant.(Stapleton et al.,2012)According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, it can lead to negative birth outcomes, insecure mother-infant attachment and consequences in the long term child development. World Health Organization reports that mothers in their postnatal phase have received less care and attention by their primary health care providers when compared to the mothers in their antenatal phase. Hence the World Health Organization (WHO,2008) insisted that mothers who have been discharged with their newborn within forty eight hours after delivery have to be assessed by a health care professional within forty eight hours after discharge from the hospital. The risk factors associated with maternal psychological distress are history of mental illness, obstetric complications at birth, premature delivery, lack of support at birth and post-delivery.( Garthus-Niegel, Susan et al.,2018) Increasing research evidence shows that psychosocial factors like lack of social support and marital harmony are significantly associated with maternal psychological distress.( Qi, W., Liu, Y., Lv, H. *et al.* ,2022) Giving birth to a baby is an important event in a mother's life that is followed by the physical fatigue and exhaustion, addressing and taking care of the needs of the baby and self, managing household activities and other duties.With the interplay of so many functions performed by the mother, social support would be a much needed aid to help her manage the various roles and responsibilities.( Jones, Eleri, and Ernestina Coast.,2013) The stress-buffering hypothesis states that social support promotes positive healthy emotions and self-efficacy thereby facilitating mental health and it also indirectly facilitates in improving mental health by helping an individual handle potential situations that can be stressful. ( Cohen, S, and T A Wills.,1985)

### Understanding specific needs of mothers in the postpartum phase

Mothers experienced a lot of physical and psychological changes post birthing. Breastfeeding is a main concern especially for first time mothers as they have many questions related to the positions, techniques and the challenges related to the process. ( Barimani, Mia et al.,2015) During their stay at hospital, mothers anticipate coherent information and guidance from the staff. Mothers wanted their emotions and feelings to be acknowledged by their primary care providers. An acknowledgement and reassurance from the primary health care provider made them feel confident. The presence of the partner is very essential for the mother to feel cared for and also receive practical support. Mothers experienced symptoms of distress when their partners had to leave and therefore have even requested to shorten the duration of stay in the hospital. ( McLeish, Jenny et al.,2020) Mothers felt confident when they were empowered with knowledge and skills. In order to

facilitate their parenting skills they need affirmations and appraisal from the experts and the health care providers.(McLeish, Jenny et al.,2021)

### **Dimensions of Social Support offered to postnatal mothers.**

According to Langford, 1997; Kahn & Antonucci, 1980, Support is defined as an “interactive process that is affected by the person's age, experience, personality, and environment.” Social support is defined as a support that is functional in nature where the recipient of support feels cared, valued and possesses a sense of belonging to a larger community. (Sherbourne, C D, and A L Stewart. ,1982) Structural support is referred to as the availability of support that are formal or informal in nature. Formal support is the support offered by the primary health care providers and informal support is the support offered by family and friends. On the other hand, functional support is referred to as emotional, informational, instrumental and appraisal support. ( Taylor S (2011)

After birthing the child, the mother goes through a rollercoaster of emotions like joy, sadness, excitement, fear, frustration etc. Mothers felt that through emotional support in forms of active listening, care and empathy and acknowledging their feelings, they feel reassured and gives them the confidence that they can sail through the tough phase. ( Schobinger, Elisabeth et al.,2022) Instrumental support is referred to the tangible support that could be financial support, helping the mother with childcare or managing household tasks. s (House, 1981)

Informational support provided by the health care provide, birth educators and nurses play a pivotal role in improving the skills and techniques in the early postpartum phase.(Sriyasak, Atcharawadee et al.,2013) Appraisal support is helping the mothers reflect on their competence and skills and provide them the reassurance and confidence related to maternal functioning. Emotional and Appraisal support are considered to be very important that boosts the confidence and positive feelings in a mother.(Langford et al.,1997;Mander.,2008)

### **Social Support as a Protective Factor or Risk Factor**

It is evident from the literature that the presence of social support is certainly a protective factor during the postnatal phase. When the available social support is sufficient, it helps to manage stress and is negatively associated with maternal psychological distress. ( Ayers, Susan et al. 2019 )Whereas when the social support is perceived as insufficient or there is a lack of social support, there are greater chances for the onset of maternal psychological distress.( Kumar, Sheena V et al.,2018)

### **Methodology**

The research paper critically examines the studies performed on the role of social support in preventing distress and enhancing the wellbeing of mothers. The articles were collected from various databases like Scopus, PubMed, PsycINFO, and Web of Science in the time period 1980-2023.The key words for search included “social support”, ”first time mothers”, “postnatal distress” and “maternal confidence.”The inclusion criteria for the studies to be reviewed are a) studied that examined the relationship between maternal psychological distress and maternal wellbeing b) studies involving first time mothers c)studies conducted only during the postnatal phase.

### **Results and Discussion**

White, L.K., Kornfield, S.L., Himes, M.M. *et al.*(2023) performed a study to explore the role of social support during the pandemic period. The results of the study highlights that a decrease in the availability of social support led to an increase in the symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress in postnatal mothers. Impaired mother-infant attachment was also observed as a result of lack or less availability of social support. Amidst the types of social support, emotional support was seen to be effective to help mothers cope with stress.

Huang, Hsin-Hui et al. (2022) explored the role of social support as a mediating factor for parental stress and confidence among first time mothers. The study employed the mediation analysis where it was found that the complete benefit of social support can be experienced on the collective collaboration of the members of the social support group. The study revealed that appraisal support amidst the other types of support,is more significantly associated with promoting maternal confidence and reducing stress levels helping mothers adapt to their new role as a mother.

Cho, H., Lee, K., Choi, E. *et al.* (2022) explored the relationship between social support and postnatal depression. Among the study participants,6% of the mothers had low social support,53.95 of the mothers had moderate levels of social support and 40.1% of the mothers had high levels of social support. The multivariate logistic regression analysis revealed that mothers with moderate levels of social support were 1.78 times more likely to develop depressive symptoms and mothers with low social support were 2.73 times more liely to develop depressive symptoms.

### **Conclusion**

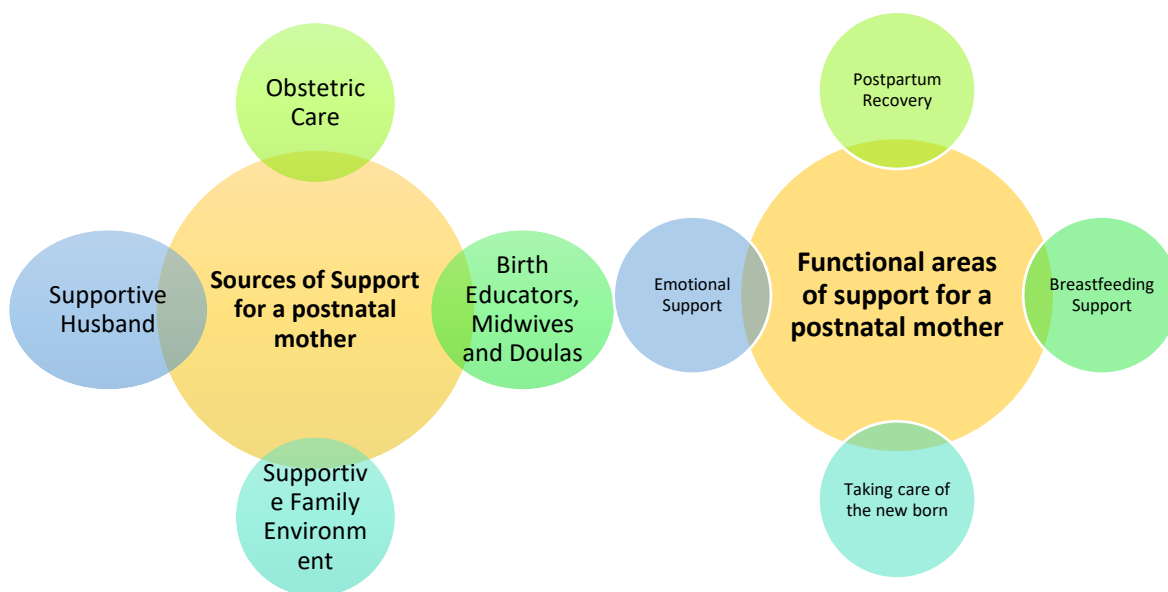
Though it is obvious from the review of literature that social support does play a pivotal role to prevent the effects of postnatal distress and promote maternal self-efficacy and confidence, the globally available research purports that the level of social support available and the quality of support offered needs to be enhanced.( Rowe, Heather J et al.,2013)It is also important to include multiparous women in the study as they would have to take care of their previous children and

there are also chances that they would receive less social support when compared to support they received during their first pregnancy. It is evident from the literature that offering support according to the needs of the first time mothers can be appreciated, acknowledged and well accepted by them.

### Implications for future research and practice

It is very important to identify the structural barriers to postnatal care. It is important to make the support more accessible and cost effective. From the review of articles, it is evident that there is a requirement of mother-centered support program that also empowers the husband and the members of the family to ensure a smooth transition to the postnatal phase. With the advent of online mode of communication, maternal empowerment education and support can be delivered through online platforms also addressing the structural barriers. It is important that the Health Care Providers prioritize the mental health of the mothers and screen them for symptoms of postnatal psychological distress during their postnatal visits. Childbirth Educators and Nurses play a key role to offer informational and emotional support to facilitate mothers have a positive postnatal experience. The below mentioned model is a combination of formal and informal sources of support based on the various functional areas to support, empower and promote well being in first time mothers.

Models showing the sources of social support and the functional areas of support for first time mothers



### Bibliography

- American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. (2013). *Depression, anxiety rates high among hospitalized pregnant women on bed rest*. Retrieved from
- Ayers S, Crawley R, Webb R, Button S, Thornton A. What are women stressed about after birth? *Birth*. (2019) 46:678–85. 10.1111/birt.12455
- Barimani M, Oxelmark L, Johansson S-E, Hylander I. Support and continuity during the first 2 weeks postpartum. *Scand J Caring Sci*. (2015) 29:409–17. 10.1111/scs.12144
- Cho, H., Lee, K., Choi, E. *et al*. Association between social support and postpartum depression. *Sci Rep* **12**, 3128 (2022).
- Cohen, S.; Wills, T.A. Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis. *Psychol. Bull.* **1985**, 98, 310–357.
- Garthus-Niegel, S., Horsch, A., Ayers, S., Junge-Hoffmeister, J., Weidner, K., & Eberhard-Gran, M. (2018). The influence of postpartum PTSD on breastfeeding: A longitudinal population-based study. *Birth (Berkeley, Calif.)*, 45(2), 193–201. <https://doi.org/10.1111/birt.12328>
- House, J. S. (1981). *Work stress and social support* / James S. House. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley PubCo
- Huang, H.-H., Lee, T.-Y., Lin, X.-T., & Duan, H.-Y. (2022). Maternal Confidence and Parenting Stress of First-Time Mothers in Taiwan: The Impact of Sources and Types of Social Support. *Healthcare*, 10(5), 878. MDPI AG. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/healthcare10050878>
- Jones E, Coast E. Social relationships and postpartum depression in South Asia: a systematic review. *Int J Soc Psychiatry*. 2013;59(7):690–700.
- Kahn, R. & Antonucci, T. (1980). *Convoys of the life course: attachment, roles and social support*. New York: USA: Academic Press.
- Kumar SV, Oliffe JL, Kelly MT. Promoting postpartum mental health in fathers: recommendations for nurse practitioners. *Am J Mens Health*. (2018) 12:221–8. 10.1177/1557988317744712
- Langford, C. P., Bowsher, J., Maloney, J. P. & Lillis, P. P. (1997). Social support: A conceptual analysis. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 25, 95- 100.
- Langford, C. P., Bowsher, J., Maloney, J. P., & Lillis, P. P. (1997). Social support: a conceptual analysis. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 25(1), 95–100. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2648.1997.1997025095.x>

14. Leahy-Warren, P., McCarthy, G., & Corcoran, P. (2012). First-time mothers: social support, maternal parental self-efficacy and postnatal depression. *Journal of clinical nursing*, 21(3-4), 388–397. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2702.2011.03701.x>
15. Machado, Tiffany & Chur-Hansen, Anna & Due, Clemence. (2020). First-time mothers' perceptions of social support: Recommendations for best practice. *Health Psychology Open*. 7. 205510291989861. 10.1177/2055102919898611.
16. Mander, Rosemary. (2008). Supportive Care and Midwifery. 1-190. 10.1002/9780470690437.
17. McLeish J, Harvey M, Redshaw M, Alderdice F. A qualitative study of first time mothers' experiences of postnatal social support from health professionals in England. *Women and Birth*. (2021) 34: e451–e60. 10.1016/j.wombi.2020.10.012
18. McLeish, J., Harvey, M., Redshaw, M., & Alderdice, F. (2020). "Reassurance that you're doing okay, or guidance if you're not": A qualitative descriptive study of pregnant first time mothers' expectations and information needs about postnatal care in England. *Midwifery*, 89, 102813. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.midw.2020.102813>
19. Qi, W., Liu, Y., Lv, H. *et al.* Effects of family relationship and social support on the mental health of Chinese postpartum women. *BMC Pregnancy Childbirth* 22, 65 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-022-04392-w>
20. Rowe H, Holton S, Fisher J (2013) Postpartum emotional support: A qualitative study of women's and men's anticipated needs and preferred sources. *Australian Journal of Primary Health* 19: 46–52.
21. Schobinger, E., Vanetti, M., Ramelet, A. S., & Horsch, A. (2022). Social support needs of first-time parents in the early-postpartum period: A qualitative study. *Frontiers in psychiatry*, 13, 1043990. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2022.1043990>
22. Sherbourne, C. D., & Stewart, A. L. (1991). The MOS social support survey. *Social science & medicine* (1982), 32(6), 705–714. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536\(91\)90150-b](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-9536(91)90150-b)
23. Sriyasak A., Åkerlind I., & Akhavan S. (2013). Childrearing among Thai first-time teenage mothers. *The Journal of Perinatal Education*, 22(4), 201–211. 10.1891/1058-1243.22.4.201
24. Stapleton L., Schetter C., Westling E., Rini C., Glynn L. M., Hobel C. J., & Sandman C. A. (2012). Perceived partner support in pregnancy predicts lower maternal and infant distress. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 26(3), 453–463. 10.1037/a0028332
25. Taylor S (2011) Social support: A review. In: Friedman HS (ed.) *The Handbook of Health Psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 189–214.
26. White, L.K., Kornfield, S.L., Himes, M.M. *et al.* The impact of postpartum social support on postpartum mental health outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Arch Womens Ment Health* 26, 531–541 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00737-023-01330-3>
27. World Health Organization. (2008). *WHO technical consultation on postnatal and postpartum care*. Retrieved from [http://whqlibdoc.who.int/hq/2010/WHO\\_MPS\\_10.03\\_eng.pdf](http://whqlibdoc.who.int/hq/2010/WHO_MPS_10.03_eng.pdf)