

EDITORIAL

POSTPARTUM PSYCHIATRIC DISORDERS – A NEGLECTED AREA IN PAKISTAN

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Postpartum psychiatric disorders, from mild Postpartum Blues to severe Depression and Psychosis, represent an underrepresented crisis in Pakistan. Despite their impact on maternal and neonatal health, these conditions are often misdiagnosed and untreated. Contributing factors include weak familial support, sociocultural stigma, and lack of awareness, especially in underserved areas. The negligence towards new mothers highlights the gaps in maternal mental health care in Pakistan, where regulatory frameworks are still evolving. This editorial explores the crisis, critiques existing services, and provides recommendations to improve early identification and intervention, aiming to raise awareness and provide strong support for affected mothers.

Keywords: Postpartum blues; Postpartum depression; Postpartum psychosis; Social stigma; Maternal mental health; Pakistan

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Beneath the joy of a newborn's arrival lies a silent crisis—postpartum psychiatric disorders. In Pakistan, these conditions, ranging from fleeting Postpartum Blues to the debilitating effects of Postpartum Depression and Psychosis, often go unnoticed. These issues are particularly acute in Pakistan, as women are often sidelined and there is a lack of comprehensive support and awareness surrounding postpartum mental health, aggravating the difficulties many women face during this period, requiring exigent attention and intervention to improve outcomes for mothers and their children.¹

United Nation's Women, (UN Women) an organization dedicated to advocating for gender equality and the empowerment of women worldwide, reports that 50–75% of women experience postpartum blues shortly after childbirth with symptoms typically subsiding within two weeks, while postpartum depression affects 10–20% of mothers, with postpartum psychosis occurring in 1 to 2 per 1,000 women globally.² Regionally, the prevalence of postpartum psychiatric disorders in Pakistan is alarmingly high. World Health Organization (WHO) reports that postpartum depression alone affects approximately 28% to 63% of women in Pakistan, marking one of the highest prevalence rates in Asia and exceeding the global average.³

Regardless of effective treatments, many women lack proper care due to young age, illiteracy, and poverty, which contribute to a lack of awareness.⁴ Mental health issues are frequently perceived as personal failures rather than treatable medical conditions in the cultural context of Pakistan,

exacerbating the emotional burden on postpartum women. Additionally, postpartum psychiatric conditions are often shrouded in deeply ingrained cultural beliefs and superstitions, with some families interpreting these conditions as possession by malevolent forces.⁵ These misguided ideologies coerce patients on an unrealistic pathway that further deteriorates their mental state.

Women's mental health is a disregarded subject in our society, even more so during vulnerable times like postpartum. Studies indicate that many Pakistani women endure significant isolation and societal pressure to project a fascia of happiness after childbirth.⁶ Postpartum Depression (PPD) disrupts mother-child bonding and contributes to developmental delays in infant.⁷ In severe cases of postpartum psychosis, psychological turmoil and child aversion can result in tragic outcomes like infanticide or maternal suicide.⁸ Beyond the personal toll, these disorders further strain Pakistan's healthcare system.⁹

Given the dire state of postpartum psychiatric care in Pakistan, mandating mental health screenings is essential for early identification and management.¹⁰ Proactive educational campaigns to elevate awareness and dismantle pervasive stigma are equally crucial.¹¹ Spirited advocacy for policy reform and advancing research into innovative therapies will drive progress and improve clinical outcomes. Integrating mental health support into maternal programs and strengthening familial and community networks will create a resilient system for new mothers.¹²

Striving to confront postpartum psychiatric disorders in Pakistan demands a paradigm shift in

maternal healthcare. Implementing mandatory mental health screenings, intensifying educational outreach, and bolstering service accessibility are not mere enhancements but crucial imperatives for redefining care standards. These interventions and concerted efforts are vital for mitigating the profound impact of these disorders on maternal and infant well-being. By embedding mental health care into routine maternal health programs and fortifying both familial and communal support frameworks, Pakistan can mitigate postpartum problems. This transformative approach will not only elevate the quality of individual care but also reinforce the healthcare system's overall resilience and efficacy. By setting this elevated standard, Pakistan will affirm its commitment to maternal mental health, thereby strengthening the integrity and responsiveness of its healthcare infrastructure.

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