

Peer Support Helps Improve Postpartum Depression

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Problem & PURPOSE

Postpartum depression has become more prevalent in recent years negatively impacting infant/mother bonding, infant development and maternal well-being.

Women in rural communities often face limited access to mental health services and supportive services.

The purpose of this project was to promote emotional well-being by implementing structured peer support programs and to reduce depressive symptoms among postpartum women in rural communities.

Available Knowledge & Rationale

- In the USA, postpartum depression occurs in 11.5% of new mothers (Gerbasi et al., 2020).
- Rural areas, including communities in Nebraska, frequently experience shortages of behavioral health services and geographical barriers to care (Gimbel et al., 2025).
- Most research has found that virtual support groups held online are the most effective during the postpartum period due to unknown schedules and finding childcare (Merza et al., 2023).

Methods

- **Context**
 - Midwestern rural community healthcare system
- **Intervention**
 - Postpartum women were recruited at the Midwestern rural hospital during the month of February after delivery.
 - In the month of March, the peer support groups took place via Zoom once a week for four weeks.
 - Topics discussed during the sessions: discussing hardships of postpartum, providing support, resources available in the community, and signs and symptoms of postpartum depression.

Methods Continued

- **Study of Intervention**
 - Participants initially completed the Edinburg Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS) assessment in the hospital prior to discharge and then completed a second form during the six-week follow-up appointment.
 - A post-evaluation survey was sent after the last session to help assess the effectiveness of the project and determine if knowledge was gained regarding PPD.
- **Measure**
 - The EPDS tool consists of 10 questions that evaluates severity of depression based on scores.
 - A post-evaluation survey was used to collect feedback on the intervention and inform future research.

Data Analysis

- Descriptive statistics were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the peer support group intervention and post-evaluation survey.
- A Likert-scale was used in the post-evaluation survey and coded for data analysis: 1-strongly agree, 2-agree, 3-disagree, and 4-strongly disagree.
- The data was entered into an Excel spreadsheet for analysis.

Results

- Three participants provided consent, but only one actively participated in the peer support group and completed the post-evaluation survey
- The participant “Agreed” the peer support group contributed to learning, provided support, and helped them feel less lonely.
- Based on the post-evaluation survey, Zoom was easy to navigate, and the timing of the peer support groups were convenient.
- The participants EPDS score pre-intervention and post-intervention were zero indicating the participant did not show any depressive symptoms before or after the intervention.

Discussion

- Given the lack of participation and only one participant, the evidence of the intervention being successful is unclear.
- The participant who actively engaged in the peer support group did not have an increase in depression-like symptoms, which could possibly suggest that the intervention did provide some support that resulted in there not being an increase in depression-like symptoms.
- Due to the participation being limited, the t-test, standard deviation, and means could not be calculated.
- The post-evaluation survey provided insight that there is a high likelihood that postpartum women would participate in a peer support group.
- Strengths included having a validated screening tool such as the EPDS and post-evaluation survey to broaden interpretation of the intervention.
- Another strength was identifying a gap such as needing more resources for postpartum women.

Conclusions

- The project has addressed the increased need for awareness and support of postpartum depression through online peer support groups.
- The project’s findings can provide valuable insight into the effectiveness of virtual peer support groups as a readily available resource in an OB/GYN clinic.
- The information may guide future research on how to integrate additional interventions into routine postpartum care and improve overall patient outcomes.

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References

