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CARRYING THE PAIN BEYOND BIRTH: A NARRATIVE REVIEW ON POSTPARTUM BACK PAIN

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ABSTRACT Postpartum back pain is a prevalent yet underrecognized complication affecting up to 50% of women after childbirth. It can persist for months, significantly impairing physical function, psychological well-being, and quality of life. This narrative review synthesizes current evidence on the prevalence, etiology, risk factors, and management strategies of postpartum back pain, drawing insights from contemporary literature. We emphasize the role of biopsychosocial factors in pain persistence and advocate for multidisciplinary, preventive approaches including patient education and physical therapy.

KEYWORDS : Postpartum Pain, Back Pain, Pregnancy, Maternal Health, Biopsychosocial Model, Pelvic Girdle Pain

1. INTRODUCTION

Postpartum back pain is a common complaint that often goes underdiagnosed and undertreated in the postnatal care continuum. While physical and emotional recovery after childbirth are routinely addressed, musculoskeletal issues like persistent back pain remain inadequately managed. Studies estimate that between 30% and 50% of women report back pain following delivery, with a significant subset experiencing symptoms lasting longer than six months. This review explores the multifactorial causes and consequences of postpartum back pain, informed by recent narrative and systematic reviews.

2. Epidemiology

The prevalence of postpartum back pain varies significantly depending on population, assessment tools, and timing of follow-up. According to a recent systematic review (IJCOG, 2024), nearly half of all postpartum women report back discomfort, with up to 10% continuing to experience pain one year post-delivery. The risk is higher among women who experienced back pain during pregnancy, particularly in the third trimester.

3. Etiopathogenesis

The etiology of postpartum back pain is multifactorial, encompassing both physiological and psychosocial components:

- **Hormonal Influences**: Elevated relaxin levels during pregnancy cause ligamentous laxity and pelvic instability, persisting into the postpartum period.
- **Biomechanical Changes**: Abdominal muscle separation (diastasis recti), altered posture, and spinal load redistribution during pregnancy contribute to chronic strain.
- **Psychological Factors**: Mood disorders, anxiety, and sleep deprivation amplify pain perception and hinder recovery.
- **Delivery-related Factors**: Instrumental or cesarean deliveries, prolonged labor, and epidural use may contribute, though evidence remains inconclusive (Eisenach et al., 2020).

4. Risk Factors

Key Predictors Of Postpartum Back Pain Include:

- Pre-existing low back or pelvic girdle pain
- High body mass index (BMI)
- Physically demanding caregiving tasks (e.g., lifting, breastfeeding postures)
- Psychological distress and inadequate social support
- Lack of antenatal education and early postpartum intervention (Bielefeldt et al., 2023)

5. Impact on Quality of Life Persistent back pain interferes with maternal mobility, sleep, mental health, and mother-infant bonding. It is also associated with postpartum depression and delays in returning to work. Unaddressed pain can evolve into chronic pain syndromes, compounding long-term disability.

6. Prevention And Management

A biopsychosocial approach is increasingly recognized as essential in both prevention and treatment:

- **Education**: Antenatal classes focusing on posture, body mechanics, and realistic expectations significantly reduce postpartum back pain incidence (Bielefeldt, 2023).
- **Physical Therapy**: Core strengthening, pelvic stabilization, and manual therapy offer substantial benefit.
- **Psychological Support**: Addressing comorbid anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances is crucial for recovery.
- **Ergonomic Training**: Proper techniques for lifting and breastfeeding can reduce mechanical strain.

7. Future Directions

Despite growing awareness, gaps remain in clinical guidelines, especially in low-resource settings. Longitudinal studies are needed to identify women at high risk and track the effectiveness of integrated intervention models. Public health policies must prioritize postpartum musculoskeletal health alongside reproductive and mental health.

8. CONCLUSION

Postpartum back pain is a significant maternal health issue that deserves greater clinical and research attention. By adopting a multidisciplinary, preventive strategy grounded in the biopsychosocial model, healthcare providers can reduce long-term disability and enhance quality of life for new mothers worldwide.

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