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MENTAL HEALTH FACTORS AMONG PREGNANT WOMEN DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Obstetrics & Gynaecology

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ABSTRACT

Pregnancy is the state of carrying a developing embryo or fetus within the female body. It begins with the fertilization of an egg and continues through to the birth of the individual. The length of the human gestation period is usually for 40 weeks. Mental health includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel and act. To observe the mental health of pregnant women, the study titled "Mental Health factors among Pregnant Women during Covid 19 pandemic" was conducted on pregnant women in India during Covid 19 pandemic. Data was collected from 300 pregnant women from five different states of India. Out of the 300 pregnant women, 150 were from the age group of 20-30 years and another 150 from the age group of 30-40 years. For the present research study, a readymade tool "WHOQOL-BREF" and self-structured tool was used to study the mental health of pregnant women. The overall mental health of pregnant women is "Average" with a response of two hundred and twenty-one (73.6%), while forty-one (13.7%) of the pregnant women had "poor" mental health and thirty-eight (12.7%) of the pregnant women had "good" mental health.

KEYWORDS

Pregnancy, Mental health, Covid 19, WHOQOL-BREF, Women

INTRODUCTION:

Pregnancy can be seen as the most powerful creation of any women yet procures many physical and intellectual changes which can be challenging and arduous. Mental health includes emotional, psychological and social well-being. It affects how one thinks, perceive and act. Emotional instability like mood swings and fear are quite common during pregnancy but constant feelings of sadness, worry, anxiety, and nervousness could be a sign of something more profound and serious. A study by **Anokye R (2018)** estimated that 10–35% of pregnant women around the world including India suffer from melancholy and misery during pregnancy and postnatal. The current situation of the unprecedented outbreak of Covid-19 had definitely increase fear, stress, worry and anxiety especially for the expecting mothers; the emergence of penurious mental well-being during pregnancy is seen to increase due to the adverse conditions of the pandemic. The outbreak can be overwhelming for pregnant women as experts have not been able to identify its effects on pregnancy and had no proof or confirmation that expecting mothers are at an elevated risk of encountering Covid 19 than the mainstream inhabitants or lack of ample and dependable confirmations on the risk of infection of the virus from the expectant mother to the unborn child. A cross-sectional study performed in China by **Y. Wu et al. (2020)** found that in the course of pregnancy, self-affirmation rates of medically pertinent worry and apprehension and despondency signs were higher among pregnant women reviewed after the announcement of the pandemic - Covid 19.

The pandemic had impacted family units and reciprocally the functions and structures. Since all the family members like the husband and children are at home during quarantine, the workload and physical daily activities and chores increased tremendously, so, the level of social support from the partner, from the family members and may affect the mental well-being of pregnant women.

The unsafe and precarious environmental conditions thus increases the vulnerability of pregnant women to psychiatric problems like stress, tension, anxiety, despondency and misery and causes extensive suffering and the reduction in responding to the needs, care and bond of new-born babies. A study by **Nayak MB et al (2010)** found that elements like immoderate partner alcohol exploitation, sexual offense, and physical brutality by the spouse, being husbandless or divorced, having low self-governance in accountability and decision making, and having low levels of endorsement from one's family affect the mental health of both married working women and housewives causing stress, anxiety, and depression. Most pregnant women with mental health problems have feelings of irritability or restlessness, worthlessness, mortification or culpability, difficulty falling asleep, loss of energy, suicidal thoughts, or attempted suicide, loss of interest, and have problems in thinking, concentrating and making decisions. Most pregnant women often get the necessary medical treatment and consultation for physical problems but often tend to neglect treatments for mental health issues. It is crucial to look after the mental well-being during pregnancy just as it is important to look after the physical well-being. In this context, the present study was done with the following objectives:

1. To study the overall mental health of pregnant women during Covid 19
2. To study the mental health of pregnant women during Covid 19 according to their age
3. To study the mental health of pregnant women during Covid 19 according to their type of family

METHOD:

The target population of the study was 300 pregnant women from five different states of India namely Mizoram, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Bangalore. The target groups were divided into two age groups i.e., from 20-30 years to 30-40 years which consists a number of 150 respondents in each group. There were 208 (69.3%) respondents who have professional jobs and 92 (30.7%) respondents who were homemakers. Out of the 300 respondents 163 (54.3%) were graduates; 113 (37.7%) finished their postgraduates; 20 (6.7%) finished their higher secondary education; 3 (1%) finished their matric and 1 (0.3%) finished their diplomas. All the 300 pregnant respondents were married and out of which 146 (48.7%) were from nuclear family and 154 (51.3%) were from joint family. There were 101 (33.7%) pregnant women who were in their first trimester; 129 (43%) in their second trimester and 70 (23.3%) in their third trimester.

PROCEDURE:

A descriptive survey was conducted during Covid 19 lockdown from April of 2020 to December of 2020 using an online platform "Google Form" via whatsapp and mail. A total of 300 pregnant women from India completed a questionnaire which assessed their socio-demographic status like age, marital status, type of family, length of pregnancy and occupation. For the present research study, readymade tool "WHOQOL-BREF" was used for the analysis of mental health of pregnant women during Covid-19 pandemic and self-structured tool was used to study the perception of pregnant women during Covid 19. Data was collected from different Sub-centers, hospitals, and mutual friends. The process was time consuming as the researcher had to do plenty of follow-ups through phone calls. Stratified random sampling was used for the data collection and data analysis.

The experience of pregnancy has been conventionally described as a happy and joyful period of time. With the increased significant toll of Covid 19 across the globe, India needs to bring awareness on preventive behaviours and therefore consultation of mental health issues should be encouraged and explored. It was found that mental health of the already vulnerable group like pregnant women in an

Indian setup is at stake and so it became important to study about mental health of the pregnant women during Covid times.

ANALYSIS OF DATA:

The data was analysed quantitatively. Keeping the objectives of the study in view, quantitative analysis statistics like percentage, mean and standard deviation were used. Correlation and t- test were used for the purpose of comparison between the quantitative variables.

RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

Table: 1. Overall Mental Health Factors Of Pregnant Women During Covid 19 Pandemic

Status Of Mental Health	Number	Percentage
Poor Mental Health	41	13.7%
Average Mental Health	221	73.6%
Good Mental Health	38	12.7%

The table 1 showed that the overall mental well-being of expecting mothers is **"Average"** with a response of two hundred and twenty-one (73.6%), while forty-one (13.7%) of the pregnant women had **"poor"** mental health and thirty-eight (12.7%) of the pregnant women had "**good**" mental well-being. The present study concluded that the mental health of the total respondents was from average to poor, and very few could manage to have a good mental health during their pregnancy due to the Covid situation.

Study done by Satyanarayana VA, Lukose A, Srinivasan K. in 2011 on Maternal mental health in pregnancy and child behaviour also found out that the poor mental health does have a negative impact on the growth and development of the child and the mother.

Table: 2. Mental Health Of Pregnant Women During COVID 19 Pandemic According To Their Age

Groups	Number	mean	SD	MD	SE_{MD}	t-value	Sig. level
Younger	150	101.92	2.582	2.560	.420	6.094	.01
Older	150	104.8	4.451				

***Significant at 0.01 level*

Table 2 showed that when the mental health of younger pregnant women and older pregnant women were compared, there was a significant difference at .01 level and the older pregnant women were found to have better mental health compared to the younger pregnant women. The reason could be the difference between first time pregnant women and multiparous pregnant women. Older pregnant women have more stable relationships, they are more educated, they become more mentally flexible with age, they are more tolerant of other people and they have obtained better access to material resources and thrive better emotionally.

Main factors associated with better Quality Of Life were mean maternal age, prim parity, early gestational age, the absence of social and economic problems, having family and friends, doing physical exercise, feeling happiness at being pregnant and being optimistic as studied by Lagadec, N., Steinecker, M., Kapassi, A. et al. in 2018

Table: 3. Mental Health Of Pregnant Women During COVID 19 Pandemic According To Their Type Of Family

Groups	Number	mean	SD	MD	SE_{MD}	t-value	Sig. level
Nuclear	158	103.13	3.624	.142	.449	.316	NS
Joint	142	103.27	4.102				

Table 3 showed that when mental health of pregnant women from nuclear and joint families was compared, there was no significant difference. The reason could be due to Covid 19, the family relationship quality was the same in both nuclear and joint families as everyone is practicing self-quarantine by staying at their homes. So, the level of social support from the partner, from the husband's family and other family members from both nuclear and joint family may have the same effect on the mental well-being of pregnant women as before the pandemic.

CONCLUSION:

Pregnancy period lasts from insemination to birth. It is a condition or situation in which a pregnant woman carries a fertilized egg inside her body. For this study, the pregnant women are from the age group of 20-40. Pregnant women are particularly vulnerable, and the outbreak of the pandemic had brought many changes, uncertainty, altered daily routines, financial problems, and social isolation. All these challenges may increase stress, anxiety, fear, sadness, loneliness, and depression. The study was focused on the perception of pregnancy during the unprecedented crisis of adverse conditions and its impact on the mental health of pregnant women.

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