



Research Paper

Perceived Stress Among Caregivers of Postnatal Mothers with Newborns Admitted in the Postnatal Wards of a Tertiary Care Hospital

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ABSTRACT

Postnatal women often experience significant stress and anxiety due to the transition into motherhood. While much attention is given to the emotional well-being of postnatal mothers, the stress experienced by their caregivers is frequently overlooked. This study aimed to assess perceived stress among caregivers of postnatal mothers admitted to postnatal wards in a tertiary care hospital. A total of 100 caregivers were recruited over two months using a consecutive sampling technique. Upon obtaining informed consent, participants completed the Perceived Stress Questionnaire (PSQ). The average PSQ index score was 0.4339, indicating a moderate level of stress among caregivers. The findings highlight the need for nurses and healthcare professionals to support caregivers with effective coping strategies, acknowledging their critical role in maternal and newborn care. Holistic family-centered care should include psychological support for caregivers to enhance the overall well-being of the family unit.

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I. Introduction

The postnatal period is marked by numerous physiological, emotional, and social changes. During this critical phase, caregivers—most often female relatives such as mothers or sisters—play a central role in supporting new mothers (Somers-Smith, 1999). Although caregiving can be a fulfilling experience, it often brings psychological and physical stress (Chien et al., 2007). However, while research has focused extensively on maternal stress, the psychological burden on caregivers remains underexplored. Stress among caregivers can lead to emotional exhaustion, compromised physical health, and burnout (Vitaliano et al., 2003). Despite their integral role, caregivers often receive little attention in maternal health programs. Studies have shown that caregiving, though rewarding, can become a source of strain when combined with inadequate resources, limited knowledge, or financial stress (Gélinas et al., 2019; Pinquart & Sörensen, 2003). Thus, understanding the stress experienced by caregivers is essential for promoting comprehensive postpartum care. This study explores perceived stress among caregivers of postnatal mothers in a hospital setting.

II. Methods

A **descriptive cross-sectional study** was conducted in the postnatal wards of a tertiary care hospital over two months to assess the perceived stress among caregivers of postnatal mothers with their newborns. **Consecutive sampling** was used to recruit **100 caregivers** of postnatal mothers with healthy babies. Inclusion criteria included caregivers who stayed with the mother from labor until discharge. After obtaining **written informed consent**, data were collected via structured interviews. Data collection consisted of two parts: Part I **Demographic Data** – including age, education, income, occupation, and relationship to the mother. Part II **Perceived Stress Questionnaire (PSQ)** – a 30-item tool developed by Levenstein et al., measuring stress-related feelings on a scale from 1 ("almost never") to 4 ("usually"). The PSQ index ranges from 0 to 1, with higher scores indicating greater perceived stress. The PSQ has shown high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.90-0.92$) and test-retest reliability ($r = 0.82$) (Levenstein et al., 1993). Data analysis was performed using **SPSS v25.0**, applying descriptive and inferential statistics. Chi-square tests were used to determine associations between stress and socio-demographic variables.

III. Results

The findings of the study were as follows

Demographic and Clinical Characteristics

- Mean age of caregivers: **43.47 years** (SD = 8.81)
- **74%** had a family income of less than ₹10,000
- **48%** had primary education; **14%** were illiterate
- **89%** were homemakers
- Majority of caregivers were **mothers of the postnatal women (64%)**
- **97%** of postnatal mothers had normal vaginal deliveries

Perceived Stress Questionnaire (PSQ)

- **Highest mean scores:** Highest mean scores were found in the following items of the Perceived stress questions
 - "You feel safe and protected" (Mean = 3.26)
 - "You feel loaded down with responsibility" (Mean = 3.09)
 - "You have too many things to do" (Mean = 2.93)
- **Lowest mean score:** Lowest mean scores were found in the following items of the perceived stress questions
 - "You feel you're doing things because you have to, not because you want to" (Mean = 1.56)

Overall PSQ Index: Table 1

	N	Mean	Std Deviation
Perceived Stress – PSQ Index	100	0.4339	.0 99

Inference: The mean score is **0.4339**, indicating a **moderate level of perceived stress**

IV. Discussion

The findings reveal that caregivers of postnatal mothers' experience moderate levels of stress. Factors contributing to stress include heavy responsibilities, time constraints, and worry about maternal and infant health. These findings align with studies that report caregiver burden is associated with psychological distress (Gélinas et al., 2019; Chien et al., 2007).

Some caregivers also reported positive emotions such as feeling calm and protected, suggesting the presence of protective coping mechanisms or support systems. However, **low income** was significantly associated with higher stress levels (**p = 0.000**), echoing findings from Pinquart and Sörensen (2003) that socioeconomic status plays a key role in caregiver well-being. Prolonged caregiver stress, if unaddressed, may lead to health complications such as chronic disease, immune dysregulation, and mental health disorders (Godbout & Glaser, 2006; Udo et al., 2014).

Clinical Implications

- Incorporate caregivers into postpartum education and counseling.
- Provide caregiver-specific support and coping strategies.
- Implement **birth preparedness classes** including caregiver roles.
- Encourage **family-centered care** in maternity services.
- Future research should explore **qualitative dimensions** of caregiver experiences.

V. Conclusions

The stress experienced by caregivers of postnatal women remains under-recognized despite their essential role in maternal care. This study highlights the need to support caregivers through proactive counseling and educational strategies. Recognizing and addressing caregiver stress will improve not only their well-being but also the quality of care provided to mothers and newborns.

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