

**Investigating the Psychiatric Burden of Women, Who Have Recently Given Birth, During the Period of the Covid-19 Pandemic and the Correlation with their Quality of Life**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study aimed to investigate the psychiatric burden of women who recently gave birth during the COVID-19 pandemic and its correlation with their quality of life. The study included 107 women with an average age of 31.4 years, from all socioeconomic classes. Data was collected using a questionnaire consisting of three parts, covering demographic characteristics, COVID-19 related questions, and two scales: the WHOQOL-BREF scale (30 questions) and the MSPSS questionnaire (12 questions). Results showed that COVID-19 restrictions negatively affected 77.6% of women during the postpartum period and 75.7% felt lonely. Women who did not have visitation during their postpartum hospital stay, who were negatively affected due to COVID-19 restrictions, and who were sick during childbirth had worse physical and mental health. Quality of life was related to demographics, with women who are not working and have 2 or 3 children having worse quality of life. Social support was found to be crucial, with the more support women received, the better their overall quality of life. The study highlights the need for health professionals to provide additional support to women during the postpartum period, particularly during the pandemic.*

**KEYWORDS:** COVID-19 pandemic, quality of life, postpartum

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Pregnancy and postpartum are two very demanding periods in a woman's life, as she has to adapt to a multitude of new situations, to change her everyday life and her living conditions. Emotional disturbances, especially during the postpartum period, are intense and the rates of anxiety, post-traumatic stress, postpartum depression, and panic are significantly high. This study, therefore, aims to enrich the field of knowledge concerning the postpartum period during the COVID-19 pandemic with new data and evidence and, more specifically, aims to investigate the psychiatric burden and its association with the quality of life of the women who have recently given birth.

## **LITERATURE/THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING**

The Credibility and reliability of sources is a critical aspect of any scientific debate and is especially important in debates related to public health and global crises such as COVID-19. In this discussion, sources used include recent research, peer-reviewed scientific journals, government reports, and reliable news sources. Drawing from a variety of sources, this discussion seeks to provide a comprehensive and accurate portrayal of COVID-19, the effects it has caused in various areas (social, economic, personal, professional) as well as the current state of the pandemic and efforts to address it. and vaccination. The use of peer-reviewed academic journals ensures that the information presented is thoroughly researched, rigorously peer-reviewed, and reflects the most recent and accurate understanding of a given topic. Government reports and websites are authoritative sources that provide reliable data and information on public health issues. Overall, the use of credible and reliable sources is essential to any scientific discussion and is especially important in discussions related to public health and global crises.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study included 107 women who had recently given birth and were from various socioeconomic backgrounds. Due to the limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the researchers employed a questionnaire that was divided into three sections and administered via the Google Forms platform to collect data. The first part of the questionnaire sought demographic data and included a few COVID-19 related questions. The second part employed the WHOQOL-BREF scale, which has 30 questions, while the third part used the MSPSS questionnaire, which includes 12 questions. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and anonymity was maintained to ensure that the data collected was reliable. The data was analyzed using SPSS 22.0, a reliable statistical program. The study's methodology was successful in collecting and analyzing the data to achieve the study's objective, with the use of validated questionnaires and a robust statistical program ensuring data accuracy and reliability.

## **RESULTS/FINDINGS**

Data analysis showed that 77.6% were negatively affected by the constraints during the postpartum period and 75.7% felt lonely. At the same time, women who did not have the possibility of visits during their postpartum hospital stay, who were negatively affected due to COVID-19 restrictions and who were sick during childbirth, had worse physical and mental health. Quality of life appears to be directly related to demographics. More specifically, women who are not working and have 2 or 3 children have worse quality of life. Finally, the most important result of the survey shows that the more social support women received from family, friends and significant others, the better their overall quality of life.

**Table 1: Demographic survey results**

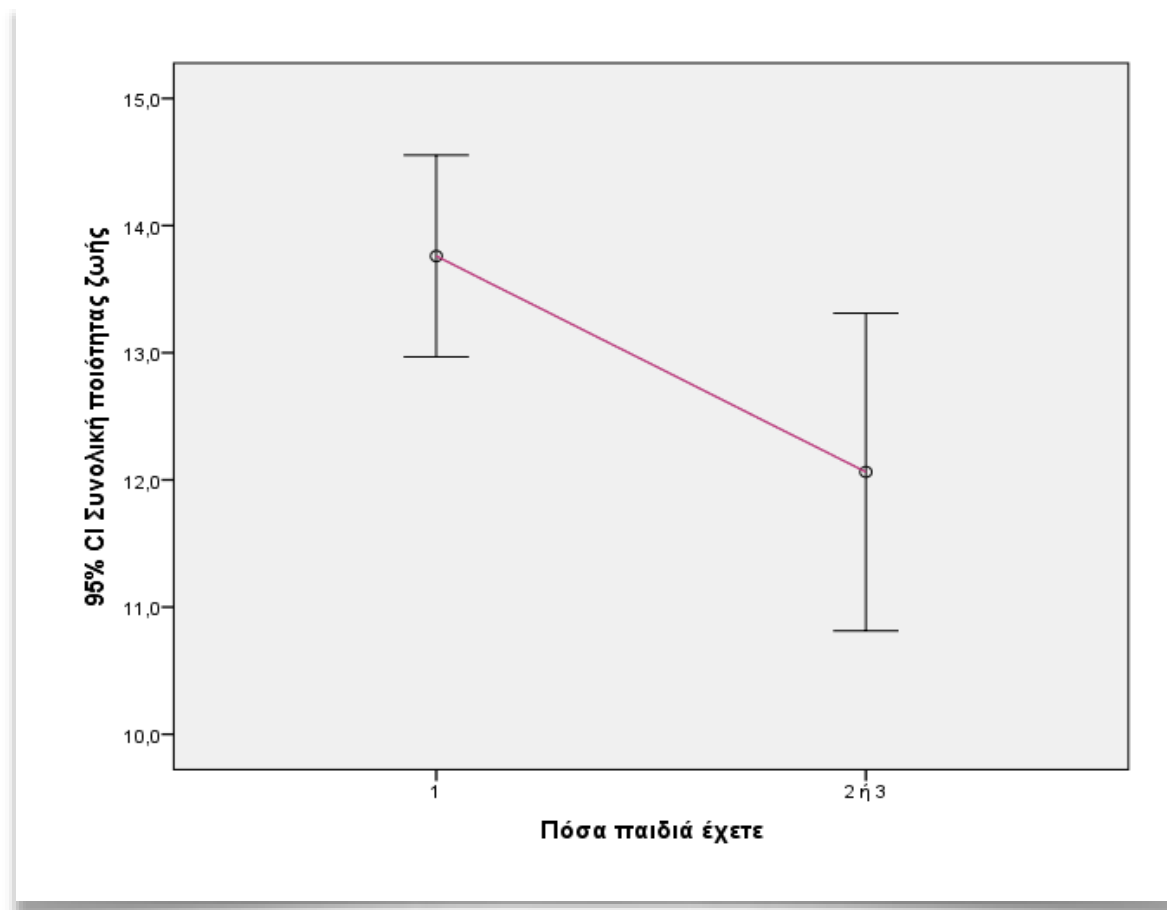
		N	%
<b>What is your marital status?</b>	Unmarried	7	6,5
	Single in dimension	14	13,1
	Widow	0	0
	Married	85	79,4
	Divorced	1	0,9
<b>Age (years), Mean (SD)</b>		31,4 (4,4)	
<b>Live</b>	Alone	16	15
	With others	91	85
<b>Work</b>	Full time	42	39,3
	Part-time	34	31,8
	Student	2	1,9
	Household	16	15
	Out of work	13	12,1
<b>How many kids do you have?</b>	1	75	70,1
	2	23	21,5
	3	9	8,4
<b>How long ago you gave birth (years), Mean (SD), Median (ind. range)</b>		1,4 (0,8)	1,3 (0,8-2)
<b>Mode of delivery</b>	Natural birth	49	45,8
	Vaginal birth (Vacuum)	19	17,8
	Planned caesarean section	15	14
	Caesarean section due to complication	24	22,4
<b>How good is your health, Mean (SD), Median (ind. range)</b>		3,7 (0,9)	4 (3-4)
<b>Are you facing any health problem in the last period?</b>	No	68	63,6
	Yes	39	36,4
<b>If yes, explain</b>	Arrythmias	1	0,9
	Diabetes Type 1	2	1,9

	Severe headaches	1	0,9
	Migraines	7	6,5
	Thyroid	2	1,9
	Vertigo	1	0,9
	Depression	2	1,9
	Depression- Thyroid	1	0,9
	Fatigue	5	4,7
	Panic attacks	1	0,9
	Crohn`s disease	2	1,9
	Multiple Sclerosis	1	0,9
	Psycological problems	13	12,1

**+5-point scale where higher values equal better health**

**Table 2: Research results concerning postpartum COVID-19 effects**

		N	%
<b>Did you have someone with you during your birth?</b>	No	37	34,6
	Yes	70	65,4
<b>Was it possible to have visitors during your stay at the hospital or clinic after giving birth?</b>	No	57	53,3
	Yes	50	46,7
<b>Did you have COVID-19 during pregnancy?</b>	No	78	72,9
	Yes	29	27,1
<b>Did you have COVID-19 during birth?</b>	No	98	91,6
	Yes	9	8,4
<b>Were you negatively affected by restrictions that resulted from COVID-19 during the postpartum period?</b>	No	24	22,4
	Yes	83	77,6
<b>Did you feel lonely during the postpartum period due to the restrictions?</b>	No	26	24,3
	Yes	81	75,7

**Table 3. Results relating quality of life (vertical) to number of children (horizontal)**

## DISCUSSION

The COVID-19 pandemic is the greatest public health threat the medical profession has faced in at least a century, resulting not only in the deaths of millions of people but also in the strain on the mental health of citizens (Eurofound, 2021). The results of the present study in combination with other studies demonstrate that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected many aspects in women's lives, including pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum (Hermann, Fitelson, Bergink, 2020; Hessami, et al., 2020).

Social support from both family, friends and health professionals is considered essential. Research reveals that with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, leave-mothers show increased help-seeking after childbirth, which reveals the need for health professionals to establish appropriate services (Vigod, et al., 2021). Midwives and other health professionals who come in contact with pregnant women should be prepared and support women during the pandemic with the ultimate goal of avoiding mental disorders and maintaining an increased level of quality of life. Particular attention

should be paid to postpartum women, especially those who are at risk or at increased risk of perinatal distress and/or have and/or are infected with COVID-19 (Matvienko-Sikar, Meedy, Ravaldi, 2020). The results of both the present study and others that have preceded it reveal the interrelated relationship between social support and quality of life. At the same time, higher levels of perceived social support are always associated with higher mental health (Szkody, Stearns, Stanhope, 2020).

Proposed solutions involve the implementation of necessary preventive screenings and measures by health professionals during pregnancy to avoid mental disorders due to COVID-19. At the same time, essential training of health professionals is needed to teach them how to provide the right psychological and social support for the woman and her husband. Furthermore, the implementation of psychological support and preparation programs for parents could be a decisive factor in dealing with problems in the postpartum period and maintaining quality of life levels.

### **Implication to Research and Practice**

As with any study, limitations were encountered in the present investigation. Specifically, a primary limitation relates to the methodology followed. As no reliable questionnaire was found regarding the psychological effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on postpartum women, some highly targeted questions were placed in the demographic characteristics. For a more comprehensive study, a specific questionnaire could be created regarding the effects of the pandemic on pregnant or postpartum women. Additionally, the number of completed questionnaires was 107, a percentage relatively small compared to the number of women who had access to the questionnaire. Therefore, the sample may not be representative of the population. To further explore the psychiatric burden of postpartum women during the COVID-19 pandemic, an additional specialized questionnaire could be administered. However, this was not included in the present study, as the time required to complete it would make it quite difficult for postpartum women. Finally, in order to create the necessary preventative measures and educate healthcare professionals for the proper support of women, further research is proposed on a larger part of the population. These implications could inform both future research and practice in the field of postpartum mental health during a pandemic.

### **CONCLUSION**

The results of the present study clearly demonstrate the negative impact of pandemic COVID-19 and its constraints on the women who recently given a birth and their quality of life. At the same time, the interconnectedness of social support with quality of life and women's need for support from both family and friends and significant others is becoming apparent. The role of health professionals is crucial as the changes brought about by the pandemic make the postpartum period even more difficult.

### **Future Research**

Based on the findings of this study, several future research directions can be considered to expand our understanding of the psychiatric burden of women who have recently given birth, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. One such direction would be to conduct a longitudinal study that tracks women's mental health and quality of life outcomes over an extended period, starting

from the antenatal period to the postpartum period. This approach would enable researchers to establish the trajectory of mental health outcomes across the perinatal period and identify the factors that influence these outcomes.

Another potential area of inquiry would be to investigate the mental health outcomes of women who gave birth during the pandemic compared to those who gave birth before the pandemic. This comparison would provide insight into the specific impact of COVID-19 on women's mental health during pregnancy and the postpartum period. Additionally, future research could examine the impact of virtual support systems and other technological interventions on the quality of life of postpartum women during the pandemic.

Lastly, the study highlights the importance of social support in improving women's overall quality of life during the postpartum period. Thus, future research could explore the specific components of social support that are most beneficial, such as the timing, type, and source of support, and how these components vary across different demographic groups. Overall, these future research ideas would contribute to a deeper understanding of the psychiatric burden of women during the postpartum period, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and inform strategies to improve their mental health outcomes and overall quality of life.

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