

The Influence of Perinatal Anxiety and Depression on Breastfeeding Behaviours: A Qualitative Systematic Review

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Abstract : Background: Estimates show that by the year 2030, mental illness will account for more than half of the global economic burden, second to non-communicable diseases. Often, the perinatal period is characterised by psychological ambivalence and a mixed anxiety-depressive condition. Maternal mental disorder is associated with perinatal anxiety and depression and affects breastfeeding behaviors. Studies also indicate that maternal mental health can considerably influence a baby's health in numerous aspects and impact the newborn health due to lack of adequate breastfeeding. However, studies reporting factors associated with breastfeeding behaviors are predominantly quantitative. Therefore, it is not clear what literature is available to understand the factors affecting breastfeeding and perinatal women's perspectives and experiences. Aim: This review aimed to explore the perceptions and experiences of women with perinatal anxiety and depression, as well as how these experiences influence their breastfeeding behaviours. Methods: A systematic literature review of qualitative studies in line with the Enhancing Transparency in Reporting the Synthesis of Qualitative Research (ENTREQ). Four electronic databases (CINAHL, PsycINFO, Embase, and Google Scholar) were explored for relevant studies using a search strategy. The search was restricted to studies published in the English language between 2000 and 2022. Findings from the literature were screened using a pre-defined screening criterion and the quality of eligible studies was appraised using the Walsh and Downe (2006) checklist. Findings were extracted and synthesised based on Braun and Clark. The review protocol was registered on PROSPERO (Ref: CRD42022319609). Result: A total of 4947 studies were identified from the four databases. Following duplicate removal and screening 16 studies met the inclusion criteria. The studies included 87 pregnant and 302 post-partum women from 12 countries. The participants were from a variety of economic, regional, and religious backgrounds, mainly from the age of 18 to 45 years old. Three main themes were identified: Barriers to breastfeeding, breastfeeding facilitators, emotional disturbance, and breastfeeding. Seven subthemes emerged from the data: expectation versus reality, uncertainty about maternal competencies, body image and breastfeeding, lack of sufficient breastfeeding support for family and caregivers' support, influences positive breastfeeding practices, breastfeeding education, and causes of mental strain among breastfeeding women. Breastfeeding duration is affected in women with mental health disorders, irrespective of their desire to breastfeed. Conclusion: There is significant empirical evidence that breastfeeding behaviour and perinatal mental disturbance are linked. However, there is a lack of evidence to apply the findings to Saudi women due to lack of empirical qualitative information. To improve the psychological well-being of mothers, it is crucial to explore and recognise any concerns with their mental, physical, and emotional well-being. Therefore, robust research is needed so that breastfeeding intervention researchers and policymakers can focus on specifically what needs to be done to help mentally distressed perinatal women and their new-born.

Keywords : pregnancy, perinatal period, anxiety, depression, emotional disturbance, breastfeeding

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