

# Postpartum Depression among Women in Kerala: A Survey

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## ABSTRACT

The increase in number of cases of Postpartum Depression (PPD) in Kerala increases day by day. A study on the awareness of PPD is necessary for this scenario. This study tries to quantify the awareness women in Kerala have about PPD and it also covers how they tackled the issue – various methods used by them to cope with the issue. The study is conducted using an online survey method. A prepared questionnaire is circulated online among 150 young mothers who were born and brought up in Kerala. The questionnaire consists of 8 questions about PPD and baby blues. Each question is provided with options from which the participants can choose one. The data thus collected are studied and analysed. The results of the survey are analysed to arrive at a conclusion. There was active participation from the side of the participants. The results show that the percentage of participants who are well aware of PPD is very low. The study brought to light that much attention and activities are needed in the case of PPD in Kerala. Most women who suffer from PPD are reluctant to seek medical help. This situation has to be changed through proper campaigns and other related activities.

**KEY WORDS:** ANXIETY, AWARENESS, COPING MECHANISM, POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION, TREATMENT.

## INTRODUCTION

Postpartum Depression is a serious issue that is faced by many women in present-day society. Postpartum Depression (PPD) is a medical condition that can be cured with proper care and treatment. In women, depression can occur during and after pregnancy. Depression after delivery can occur as “baby blues” that last only for one or two weeks after childbirth. It has mild symptoms like mood swings, anxiety, and insomnia. A more severe condition is Postpartum Depression. It is long-lasting than baby blues and shows intense symptoms including anxiety and panic attacks, sadness, irritability, severe mood swings, problems in appetite, difficulty in bonding with your baby, thoughts about harming baby or yourself and severe anger (Jayarajan 2021).

The lack of awareness about Postpartum Depression increases the depth of the problem. Studies show that the lack of early detection of PPD also worsens the condition. The awareness of the real problem – that is, PPD is a serious issue that can affect the female’s later life – can bring some changes in the present situation (Zauderer 2009). The purpose of the study is to bring the problem of PPD to the forefront and thus reduce the risk women face nowadays. Such a study is relevant where people are unaware of the

seriousness of PPD and when no proper care is given to women suffering from PPD. The study tries to quantify women’s awareness of the issue (Jayarajan 2021). The relevance of the study is high as there are no such studies conducted in Kerala in recent times. Moreover, a study like this can contribute to the area of mental health, the overall well-being of a society and the development of the health sector of Kerala.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

An in-depth analysis of Postpartum Depression was conducted using a survey. The study was conducted by circulating the prepared questionnaire among 150 young mothers. The sample of the study was selected after much research on the topic. The ages of the participants were in the range of 25 – 40. Mothers who gave birth in the last 10 years, and who were born and brought up in Kerala were considered for this study.

This was done to examine the recent developments in the area, especially in Kerala. The research subjects were verified to be cognizant of English and all the questions were in English. The participants were well informed about the intention of the survey. They were informed to read the instructions clearly and answer the questions. It is also assured that their details will be kept confidential. The survey mainly aimed at checking the knowledge/awareness women in Kerala had about PPD. Moreover, the study checked how they came to know about PPD and how far they were aware

of the issue. It also helped to collect information about their personal experience of PPD, and how they overcame it. The problem of bonding with the baby was also included as one question.

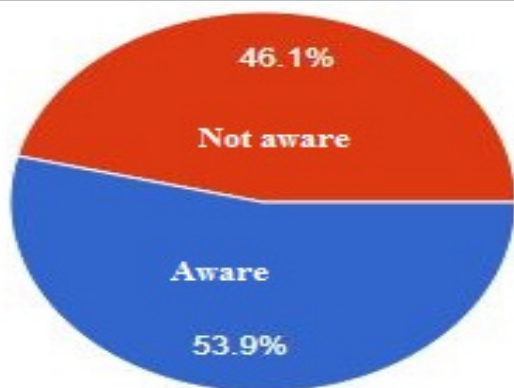
The questionnaire consisted of 8 questions about PPD and baby blues. These were intended to collect information about the level of awareness women had about PPD, how they came to know about it, have they attended any awareness programs etc. The survey also tried to collect information about the coping mechanism the participants chose to overcome the situation. Responses to this particular question revealed how worse are the condition and what percentage of women seeks medical help. There were questions about the symptoms they had to suffer and about the time they experienced it. Each of the questions was given options from which the participants can choose one. The number of the options varied from question to question, that is, from 2 – 5. The research subjects were verified to be cognizant of English and all the questions were in English.

The participants were well informed about the intention of the survey. They were informed to read the instructions clearly and answer the questions. It is also assured that their details will be kept confidential (Jayarajan 2021). The present study has been approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee of Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Coimbatore. All due permissions have been taken by the concerned authorities including consent etc.

### RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The intensity of the psychic problems faced by women suffering from PPD needs to be discussed in detail, and a long-lasting solution has to be found. An important part of reducing the percentage of patients can be done by giving proper awareness. Not only females but also males and people of other genders have to be educated about the mental condition of women during and after pregnancy. Medical professionals suggest providing proper awareness can reduce the problem in a considerable way. This can contribute a lot to the healthy development of the baby and mother (Zauderer 2009).

**Figure 1: Pie chart showing the awareness of participants about Baby Blues**



**Figure 2: Pie chart showing the awareness of participants about PPD**

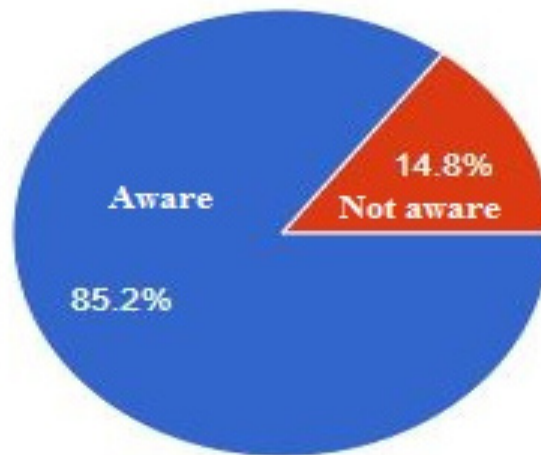
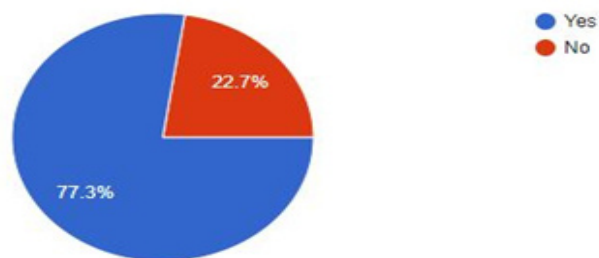
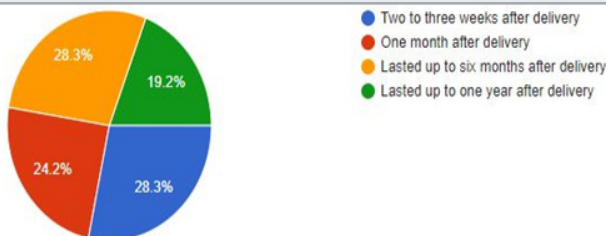


Figure one shows that only about 53.9% of the participants heard about baby blues. This revealed the intensity of the situation. The participants included in the other section, that was, the 46.1%, might be the ones who have gone through the same. But unawareness of the real problem worsens the condition. As baby blues last only for two or three weeks it is not a dangerous problem as PPD. But even in the case of PPD, a considerable percentage of people who were unaware of PPD was found. Figure 2 shows that 14.8 % of the participants were unaware of postpartum depression. And the results show that people were not much aware of serious problems like PPD as they are of Baby Blues. This condition has to be changed through continuous practices to make the general public aware of PPD and its symptoms (Jayarajan 2021).

**Figure 3: Pie chart showing the response of participants to whether they faced symptoms of PPD**



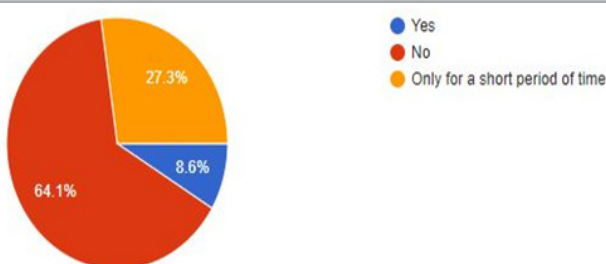
**Figure 4: Pie chart showing how much time did the participants felt the symptoms**



There exists a social stigma in India, especially in Kerala, to consult a psychiatrist or a psychologist (The Hindu 2018). This is another reason which prevents the cure of PPD through proper treatment. People are reluctant to admit the fact that they are facing some mental problems. The same kind of reluctance is there in the case of PPD also. They fear a kind of 'Othering' from society and its roots can be traced back to the stigma toward a madness that existed in the Middle Ages. This tendency limits the possibility to take proper medical care. This can also be controlled by conducting awareness programs and thus normalizing mental problems and depression (Foucault 1988; Kuriakose et al. 2020; Jayarajan 2021).

Figure three and four brings out the seriousness of the situation. In Figure three, one can see that about 77.3% of participants faced the symptoms of PPD. This is proof of the problem faced by women after delivery. Figure four gives the period for which they faced these difficulties. 19.2% faced symptoms of PPD up to one year after delivery/C-section. For 28.3% it lasted for six months, and for 24.2% it lasted up to one month. Only 28.3% experienced it for two weeks after childbirth (Kuriakose et al. 2020).

**Figure 5: Pie chart showing the level of difficulty the participants faced in bonding with the baby**



**Figure 6: Pie chart showing how participants with PPD cope up with it**

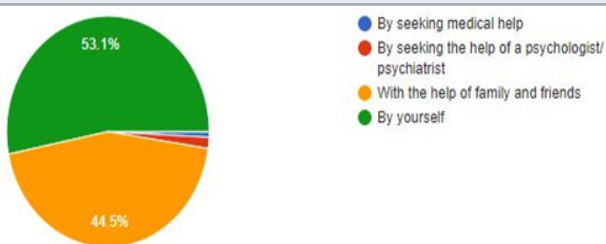


Figure 5 shows that 8.6% of the participants found it difficult to create a bond with the baby and 27.3% of them felt the same for a short period. This is a period that is highly dangerous and may lead up to harming a child and oneself. Recent news reports give evidence of this were mothers in their depressive state harmed babies and some violent acts ended up in their death (Jayarajan 2021). The results of the survey indicate that most of the participants have gone through severe Postpartum Depression and all of them needed medical help. But Figure 6 shows the real scenario of Kerala's treatment of a serious mental issue like PPD (Jayachandran 2021).

Even though most of the participants faced severe PPD-related problems only 0.8% of them sought medical help and only 1.6% of them were ready to seek the help of a psychologist or psychiatrist. This reveals the pathetic condition of Kerala concerning PPD. This situation can be changed by giving proper awareness about the issue. The collected data shows that only 7% of the participants had attended any awareness programs related to PPD. Most of them learned about this issue through social media. And some of them learned through articles and only 1.7% of them got informed through the newspapers. This shows that the government, health department, as well as the public, have to play a significant role in reducing the difficulties faced by mothers and newborns (Kuriakose et al. 2020).

The study, 'Prevalence of depression among middle-aged women in the rural area of Kerala', conducted by Archana P S, Soumitra Das and Sairu Philip et al., tries to determine the prevalence of depression among women aged 40 – 60 years in the rural area of Kerala using Patient Health Questionnaire 9 (PHQ – 9). The setting of the study is Ambalappuzha, a rural area in the district of Alappuzha. (Archana et al. 2017; Kuriakose et al. 2020). In contrast, this study tried to include young women from all over Kerala who gave birth in the last 10 years. Moreover, this study concentrates only on depression that comes as a result of pregnancy and/or delivery.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of the present study quantify the awareness young mothers in Kerala have about PPD. As this study deals with a health-related issue which is related to the well-being of society, it has significance in the present scenario. This study prompts studies in the future that may lead to change in the current situation. Proper awareness about the issue can be given through newspapers, news channels, social media and other media. Constant active participation from the public and initiatives from the government is needed to improve the situation.

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**Conflict of Interests:** Authors declare no conflict of interests to disclose.

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