## HEALTH EDUCATION AND PREVENTION OF POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION: The role of obstetric nursing

*THE PRACTICE OF HEALTH EDUCATION BY NURSES IN THE CONTEXT OF PRIMARY HEALTH CARE: INTEGRATIVE REVIEW*

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**SUMMARY:**The research addresses the importance of health education and the prevention of postpartum depression in the context of obstetric care, highlighting the role of nursing in the care of pregnant and postpartum women. Postpartum depression is a condition that affects many women and can have serious consequences for the mother and the baby's development. The general objective of the study was to investigate the impact of health education actions carried out by obstetric nurses in the prevention and management of postpartum depression, focusing on screening strategies, emotional support and educational interventions. The methodology used was a literature review, covering scientific articles published between 2019 and 2024, resulting in 12 articles that address the role of obstetric nursing in health education and prevention of postpartum depression, in which the inclusion criteria were articles published in Portuguese, and the inclusion criterion with the DeCS: Depression. Obstetric nursing. Health education. Studies in Portuguese that specifically addressed the role of these professionals in this context were included. The research was conducted through electronic databases such as PubMed, Scopus and BVS, using descriptors related to mental health, childbirth and health education. The results indicate that obstetric nurses play an essential role in raising awareness and supporting women, promoting preventive practices that reduce the incidence of postpartum depression. The implementation of educational and welcoming strategies in the prenatal and postpartum periods, associated with continuous emotional support, has proven effective in improving the mental health of pregnant and postpartum women. **Keywords:**Depression. Obstetric nursing. Health education.

**ABSTRACT:**The research addresses the importance of health education and prevention of postpartum depression in the context of obstetric care, highlighting the role of nursing in the care of pregnant and postpartum women. Postpartum depression is a condition that affects many women and can have serious consequences for the mother and the development of the baby. The general objective of the study was to investigate the impact of health education actions carried out by obstetric nurses in the prevention and management of postpartum depression, focusing on detection strategies, emotional support and educational interventions. The methodology used was a literature review, covering scientific articles published between 2019 and 2024, resulting in 12 articles addressing the role of obstetric nursing in health education and prevention of postpartum depression, in which the inclusion criteria were articles published in Portuguese, and the Inclusion Criterion with the DeCS: Depression. Obstetric Nursing. HealthEducation. Studies in Portuguese that specifically addressed the role of these professionals in this context were included. The research was conducted through electronic databases such as PubMed, Scopus and VHL, using descriptors related to mental health, childbirth and health education. The results indicate that obstetric nurses play an essential role in raising awareness and supporting women, promoting preventive practices that reduce the incidence of postpartum depression. The implementation of educational and welcoming strategies in the prenatal and postpartum period, associated with continuous emotional support, proved to be effective in improving the mental health of pregnant and postpartum women. **Keywords:**Depression. Obstetric nursing. Health education.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Health education and prevention of postpartum depression are fundamental areas in maternal and child care, aiming to ensure the physical and emotional well-being of mother and baby. Postpartum depression is a serious condition that affects millions of women worldwide, with significant consequences not only for the mother, but also for the development of the bond with the baby and the family environment (Freitas *et al*., 2023). In this context, obstetric nursing plays a crucial role, as it is on the front line of care during pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum, and can provide emotional support, relevant information and preventive interventions to identify and address early signs of postpartum depression.

childbirth, thus contributing to the overall health of the woman and the newborn.

Obstetric nurses are uniquely positioned to provide health education during the prenatal period, preparing pregnant women for the physical and emotional changes that occur during pregnancy and postpartum. Through regular consultations, educational sessions, and ongoing support, obstetric nurses can help women develop coping skills, promote healthy habits, and identify risk factors that may contribute to the development of postpartum depression. In this way, integrating health education and prevention of postpartum depression into obstetric care provided by nurses not only benefits women during the perinatal period, but also establishes solid foundations for long-term maternal and child health (Alves; Passos, 2022).

The issues surrounding health education and prevention of postpartum depression are multifaceted. First, lack of awareness and understanding of the symptoms and impacts of postpartum depression can lead to underreporting and undertreatment of this condition, resulting in adverse consequences for maternal and child health. In addition, socioeconomic issues, such as lack of access to adequate health care, insufficient social support, and stigma associated with mental health, can hinder early identification and effective treatment of postpartum depression (Pereira; Passos, 2022).

Furthermore, the burden on the health system, especially in resource-limited regions, may result in gaps in the provision of integrated and holistic care during the perinatal period, neglecting the importance of health education and prevention of postpartum depression. These challenges highlight the urgent need for interdisciplinary and woman-centered approaches, with obstetric nurses playing a crucial role in mitigating these issues and promoting maternal and child well-being.

Therefore, the research aims to answer the following question: What is the impact of the work of obstetric nursing on health education and the prevention of postpartum depression among pregnant and postpartum women, considering factors such as socioeconomic challenges, levels of awareness and access to health care?

The general objective of this study is to highlight the impact of obstetric nursing on health education and the prevention of postpartum depression. To this end, we aimed to identify the best practices and educational interventions implemented by obstetric nurses to prevent postpartum depression, including screening strategies, counseling and emotional support during pregnancy and postpartum, analyze the impact of interventions led by obstetric nursing in reducing the incidence and severity of postpartum depression and describe the care in relation to obstetric nursing in relation to the quality of emotional support, information and care received during the perinatal period, highlighting factors that contribute to better adherence to preventive and self-care practices.

Postpartum depression represents a significant challenge to maternal and child health worldwide, affecting not only the mother but also the emotional and cognitive development of the baby. The rationale for this study lies in the importance of understanding and addressing this condition effectively, especially considering the fundamental role that obstetric nursing plays in perinatal care (Freitas et al., 2023).

The relevance of this research is highlighted by the need to promote preventive and educational interventions that can help mitigate the impact of postpartum depression on women and their families. By investigating the specific role of obstetric nursing in this context, it is expected to provide valuable insights into woman-centered and evidence-based care strategies that can be implemented in different health contexts (Alves; Passos, 2022).

This literature review will contribute to the advancement of scientific knowledge on the effectiveness of interventions led by obstetric nurses in the prevention and management of postpartum depression, filling gaps in the literature and informing future clinical practices and health policies focused on maternal and child well-being. Ultimately, the goal is to improve the quality of perinatal care by promoting a smoother transition into motherhood and reducing the adverse impact of postpartum depression on health of women and their children.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 THEORIES OF LEARNING AND BEHAVIOR CHANGE IN EDUCATION IN HEALTH

Learning and behavior change theories play a fundamental role

in health education, providing a theoretical basis for understanding how people acquire knowledge and modify their attitudes and behaviors towards health. According to Freitas et al.(2023). These theories are essential to guide the design and implementation of effective interventions that aim to promote the adoption of healthy behaviors and disease prevention.

One of the most well-known and widely used theories in health education is the Social Learning Theory, proposed by Albert Bandura. This theory highlights the importance of observing and modeling behavior, as well as the influence of the social environment on the learning process. According to Social Learning Theory, people learn through observing models who demonstrate specific behaviors, and these behaviors are reinforced or inhibited based on the consequences they receive. In health education, this theory suggests that it is important to provide models of healthy behaviors and offer incentives and rewards to encourage the adoption of these behaviors (Alves; Passos, 2022).

Another relevant theory is the Theory of Behavior Change, which is based on the idea that human behavior is influenced by individual, interpersonal and environmental factors (Silva et al., 2024). This theory highlights the importance of awareness, motivation, and skills in promoting behavior change. According to this theory, behavior change occurs in different stages, which include precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance. In health education, Behavior Change Theory suggests that interventions should be tailored to each individual's needs and stages of change, providing relevant information, increasing motivation, and developing practical skills to facilitate the adoption of healthy behaviors.

Self-Determination Theory also plays an important role in health education, emphasizing the importance of autonomy, competence, and interpersonal relationships in people's intrinsic motivation for behavior change. According to this theory, people are more likely to adopt healthy behaviors when they feel autonomous, competent, and connected to others. In health education practice, this means that it is essential to provide meaningful choices, opportunities for skill development, and social support to promote intrinsic motivation and the sustainability of behavior changes (Alves; Passos, 2022).

2.2 WOMEN-CENTERED NURSING APPROACHES TO PERINATAL CARE

Women-centered nursing approaches to perinatal care represent a holistic and compassionate approach that recognizes the individual needs, experiences, and preferences of women during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period. This approach seeks to provide personalized care that promotes maternal and neonatal health, respecting women's autonomy and empowerment (Barbosa; Tinoco, 2023).

In the context of perinatal care, woman-centered approaches emphasize the importance of effective communication and the establishment of a therapeutic relationship between the obstetric nurse and the pregnant woman. This allows the woman to feel heard, understood, and supported in her decisions related to pregnancy, birth, and newborn care. Silva et al.(2024) emphasize that the obstetric nurse acts as a facilitator of the shared decision-making process, providing accurate and evidence-based information, and helping women to explore their care options in an autonomous and informed way.

One of the main characteristics of women-centered approaches is the recognition of the cultural, social and emotional diversity of women and their families. This implies adapting perinatal care to the specific needs of each woman, taking into account her individual beliefs, values, traditions and preferences. The obstetric nurse acts as a cultural mediator, facilitating respect and mutual understanding between health professionals and women from different ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds (Freitas et al., 2023).

Women-centered approaches to perinatal care value the promotion of women's autonomy and empowerment regarding their health and well-being. This includes encouraging women's active participation in all stages of the care process, from developing the birth plan to monitoring the baby's development. The obstetric nurse acts as an advocate for women's reproductive rights, ensuring that their choices and preferences are respected and that they have access to reliable information and ongoing support during the perinatal period (Alves; Passos, 2022).

Finally, women-centered approaches to perinatal care seek to promote a humanized and respectful birth experience that values   women's protagonism and dignity. This involves providing a welcoming and safe environment where women feel comfortable, supported and respected.

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during labor and delivery. The obstetric nurse plays a fundamental role in creating this environment, offering emotional support, physical comfort and individualized technical assistance, according to the needs of each woman (Paula; Oliveira, 2023).

Postpartum depression (PPD) is a psychological condition that affects a significant number of women, usually in the first few weeks after the birth of a child. This condition has been widely studied due to its impact on mothers, children and the entire family structure. Freitas*et al.*(2023) point out that identifying PPD symptoms can be complex, since the transition to motherhood brings with it a series of emotional and physical challenges that can mask the signs of the disease. For the authors, early diagnosis is essential, since failure to treat PPD adequately can lead to serious consequences, both for the mother's mental health and for the child's development.

The role of the nursing team in monitoring these women is widely recognized. The nursing professional is a key player in the first contact with the mother and newborn, being able to identify risk factors and promote initial interventions. The ability to recognize the symptoms of PPD and refer the patient for appropriate treatment are essential actions to minimize the impacts of postpartum depression on the life of the woman and her family (De Paula; Oliveira, 2023).

The role of nurses is not limited to treating the established condition, but also to preventing PPD. According to Santos*et al.*(2022), socioeconomic factors and social support play a crucial role in the development of postpartum depressive symptoms. Women with lower levels of social support, as well as those in contexts of socioeconomic vulnerability, are more likely to develop the disease. These authors highlight the importance of preventive interventions, such as the promotion of support networks and the strengthening of social ties, an aspect that can be directly influenced by the work of health professionals, such as nurses, who can act in guiding family members and the community on the relevance of continuous support for new mothers.

Diagnosing PPD is challenging, since symptoms are often confused with normal postpartum changes, such as fatigue and mood swings. However, the persistence and intensity of symptoms are warning signs that nurses should be able to identify. A multidisciplinary approach, involving doctors, psychologists and nurses, is recommended to ensure comprehensive care for the patient, considering the physical and emotional dimensions of the motherhood process (Freitas*et al.*, 2023).

The literature indicates that raising awareness among health professionals about PPD is an important step towards improving the diagnosis and treatment of the condition. Although PPD is a widely known condition, there are still gaps in the training of health professionals regarding the early recognition of symptoms and the correct approach to patients. Health education, therefore, should be a priority for the nursing sector, ensuring that professionals are prepared to deal with the various forms of PPD manifestation (Monteiro*et al.,*2020).

Creating support and monitoring strategies is one of the most effective ways to prevent PPD from worsening. A humanized support, in which women feel listened to and supported, can make a difference in the course of the disease. In this sense, nurses have a fundamental role in providing an environment of trust, in which mothers can report their feelings without fear of judgment. Continuous monitoring during the postpartum period, with home visits and regular checkups, is essential for the success of the treatment and for the prevention of complications (Oliveira, 2023).

The interaction between socioeconomic characteristics and the development of DPP is also addressed by Santos*et al.*(2022), which indicate that women in vulnerable situations are more exposed to the risk factors of the disease. This data reinforces the importance of public policies that guarantee access to mental health, especially for marginalized populations. In this context, the role of nurses in primary care is even more relevant, as they are directly involved in the care of these populations and can play a fundamental role in the prevention and treatment of PPD.

Monteiro's study*et al.*(2020) reveals that nurses' interventions go beyond identifying PPD symptoms. These professionals also play an important role in educating patients and their families about the disease. Postpartum depression is often stigmatized, which makes it difficult to recognize and receive appropriate treatment. By educating patients and their families about the signs and symptoms of PPD, nurses help to demystify the disease and facilitate access to treatment. The work of nurses in providing care for PPD is, therefore, a complex task, which involves not only technical care, but also a humanized approach that is attentive to the specificities of each patient.

2.3 INTERVENTION MODELS FOR PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT OF POST-COVID-19 DEPRESSION

Postpartum depression is a mental health condition that affects many women after childbirth, representing a significant challenge to maternal and child health. In this context, the implementation of intervention models for the prevention and management of postpartum depression has proven crucial to reduce the impact of this condition and promote the well-being of women and their children (Alves; Passos, 2022).

One of the most widely studied and applied intervention models is the cognitive-behavioral (CC) intervention model. This model focuses on identifying and modifying negative thoughts and dysfunctional behaviors that contribute to the development and perpetuation of postpartum depression. Women are taught to recognize and challenge negative thought patterns, develop effective coping skills, and seek social and emotional support to deal with the stress and demands of the postpartum period. Studies have shown that cognitive-behavioral therapy can be effective in reducing symptoms of postpartum depression and preventing recurrence (Lima, 2022).

Another promising intervention model, in this case highlighted by Marinho*et al.*(2021) is the social support model. This model emphasizes the importance of emotional and practical support from family, friends, and health care professionals in managing postpartum depression. Women are encouraged to seek and maintain healthy relationships, participate in support groups, and share their experiences with other women facing similar challenges. Social support can help women feel less isolated, more understood, and better able to cope with postpartum challenges, thereby reducing the risk of developing or worsening postpartum depression.

The parenting skills-based intervention model has been shown to be effective in preventing and managing postpartum depression. This model focuses on developing positive parenting skills and fostering mother-infant bonding, which can have a positive impact on women's emotional well-being. Women are taught to recognize their babies' needs and cues, cope with the stress and fatigue associated with newborn care, and develop effective strategies to cope with the demands of motherhood. Strengthening parenting skills can help women feel more confident and competent in their roles as mothers, thereby reducing the risk of developing postpartum depression (Lima, 2022).

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

The target population for the literature review consisted of studies that presented women in the postpartum period. These studies were selected due to the relevance of the topic to the research, which focused on issues related to mental health and the role of obstetric nursing in this context.

The sample consisted of scientific articles published between 2019 and 2024, resulting in 12 articles. These articles were available in Portuguese and specifically addressed the role of obstetric nursing in health education and the prevention of postpartum depression. The chosen time frame allowed the analysis of more recent materials aligned with contemporary nursing practices.

The inclusion criteria included articles published between 2019 and 2024, available in Portuguese. In addition, the selected studies should address the role of obstetric nursing in health education and in the prevention of postpartum depression. These criteria ensured that the studies analyzed were relevant and directly related to the research objective.

On the other hand, the exclusion criteria included articles that did not present a clear and detailed methodology. Studies that dealt exclusively with other areas of nursing, without a specific focus on obstetric nursing, were also excluded. The exclusion of these articles was necessary to ensure the quality and relevance of the material reviewed. The research followed a direct approach to conduct the literature review. This type of methodology allowed for a careful selection of articles, based on well-established methodological standards, which strengthened the reliability of the results obtained.

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The characteristics of the research were based on a literature review, carried out through electronic databases such as PubMed, Scopus and the Virtual Health Library (BVS). The search was broad and comprehensive, using search terms such as depression, childbirth and health education, in order to find relevant studies. The titles and abstracts of the articles were initially reviewed, and those that met the inclusion criteria underwent a complete reading for more detailed evaluation.

The selected articles were critically analyzed for their relevance and methodological quality. dological, using appropriate assessment tools. The extracted information was organized into thematic categories, which allowed a clear synthesis of the results. This approach ensured that the evidence obtained was reliable and up-to-date, providing a solid basis for understanding the role of obstetric nursing in the prevention of postpartum depression.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research on the impact of obstetric nursing on health education and the prevention of postpartum depression reveals the importance of this professional in several aspects, from prevention to direct assistance to pregnant and postpartum women.

Table 1 – Research results

| Name | Objective | Title | Year |
|------|-----------|-------|------|
| ALVES, Lindomar Sousa; STEPS, Sandra Godoi | Identify risk factors for postpartum depression and nursing role | Risk factors for postpartum depression and nursing performance | 2022 |
| BARBOSA, Thabata Moreti; TINOCO, Michelle Messias | Explore the role of nurses in puerperal care in the face of postpartum depression | The role of nurses in postpartum care: postpartum depression | 2023 |
| OF PAULA, Jessica Fields; OLIVEIRA, Adriana Delmondes | Analyze the role of nursing in the prevention and care of patients with postpartum depression | The role of nursing in the prevention and care of patients with postpartum depression in primary care | 2023 |
| FREITAS, Thais Alves et al. | Discuss the challenges of diagnosing postpartum depression and providing nursing care | The challenge of postpartum depression (PPD): from the complexity of diagnosis to nursing care | 2023 |
| LIMA, Alexander Severus Barros | Narratively review nursing care for women with postpartum depression | Care of nursing to the Women with postpartum depression: narrative review | 2022 |
| LIMA, T. C. S; MIOTO, R. C. T. | Address scientific research methodologies in the construction of knowledge | Procedures methodological in the construction of scientific knowledge: bibliographic research | 2007 |
| MARINE, Adeilma Milhomem Pereira et al. | Analyze the practice of obstetric violence and the role of nurses in women's empowerment | The practice of obstetric violence and the role of nurses in women's empowerment | 2021 |
| MONTEIRO, Almira Silva Justen et al. | Exploring the role of nurses in postpartum depression | Postpartum depression: the role of the nurse | 2020 |
| PAULA, Jessica Campos; OLIVEIRA, Adriana Delmondes | To examine prevention and nursing care for postpartum depression in primary care | The role of nursing in the prevention and care of patients with postpartum depression in primary care | 2023 |
| PEREIRA, Vanessa Duca Valença et al. | To assess the effectiveness of obstetric nurses in health education for pregnant women | The Role of the Obstetric Nurse and its Effectiveness in Health Education for Pregnant Women | 2020 |
| SANTOS, Maria Luisa Wedge et al. | To investigate the association between symptoms of postpartum depression and socioeconomic characteristics | Symptoms of postpartum depression and their association with socioeconomic characteristics and social support | 2022 |
| SILVA, Bruna Martins et al. | To study the role of nurses in the prevention and detection of postpartum depression during prenatal care | Postpartum depression: the role of nurses in prevention and detection during prenatal care | 2024 |

Source: Author (2024).

Alves and Passos (2022) highlight that identifying risk factors for postpartum depression is essential so that nurses can intervene effectively, addressing conditions of vulnerability and carrying out preventive monitoring that favors women's mental health in the postpartum period.

The role of nurses in postpartum care is explored by Barbosa and Tinoco (2023), who

emphasize the importance of this monitoring as a crucial support in coping with emotional conditions that can evolve into postpartum depression. In this sense, proximity to the puerperal woman is essential for the professional to identify signs of risk and offer adequate psychosocial support, creating an environment of trust and acceptance.

De Paula and Oliveira (2023) emphasize the role of nursing in primary care, where the obstetric nurse can act with preventive and educational actions that aim not only at treatment, but also at promoting the mental health of pregnant and postpartum women. Freitas *et al.* (2023) add that the challenges in diagnosing postpartum depression often make care difficult. However, they argue that the complexity of the diagnosis reinforces the need for sensitive and skilled action on the part of the nurse.

Lima (2022) explores, in a narrative review, the specific care that nursing should direct to women with postpartum depression, contributing to care based on the best scientific evidence available. This type of review expands knowledge about strategies that nursing can adopt to improve the emotional health of patients.

Marine *et al.* (2021) also address a specific aspect, which is obstetric violence, relating the importance of the nurse's role in empowering women and educating them so that they are aware of their rights during the perinatal period. Monteiro *et al.* (2020) reiterate the relevance of this intervention by the obstetric nurse, indicating that the guidance and support offered from prenatal care onwards are crucial to reducing the risk of postpartum depression.

From Pereira's perspective *et al.* (2020), the effectiveness of the obstetric nurse in health education is essential to provide pregnant women with the necessary information to face the gestational and postpartum period with greater security and emotional preparation, a factor that contributes to more effective prevention of postpartum depression. Santos *et al.* (2022) complement this view by investigating the relationship between symptoms of postpartum depression and socioeconomic and social support characteristics, elements that nurses can observe and consider in their interventions so that support is adjusted to the patient's individual needs.

Finally, Silva *et al.* (2024) highlight the preventive role of the obstetric nurse during prenatal care, reinforcing that early detection of symptoms of depression and health education are indispensable tools for promoting women's mental health in the postpartum period.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The research presented here aimed to explore the impact of obstetric nursing on health education and the prevention of postpartum depression, focusing on identifying educational practices, screening strategies and emotional support offered to pregnant and postpartum women. Through the literature review, it was possible to verify that the interventions developed by obstetric nursing, especially in the context of primary care, play a central role in the early identification of symptoms of postpartum depression and in the implementation of effective preventive practices.

Throughout the study, it became clear that health education provided by obstetric nurses not only contributes to raising awareness about the risks of postpartum depression, but also empowers women to face the emotional and physical challenges of the perinatal period. The work of these professionals allows pregnant and postpartum women to receive valuable information about mental health, which favors early recognition of symptoms and seeking specialized help when necessary. Continuous emotional support and support during nursing consultations are effective strategies that strengthen women's trust in the health system and reduce the stigma associated with depression.

Another point that has been widely addressed is the impact of socioeconomic conditions and social support on the development of postpartum depression. Research has shown that women in situations of socioeconomic vulnerability, with less access to adequate health care and support networks, are more prone to developing the condition. In this sense, the role of obstetric nursing in primary care ria, with a focus on educational and preventive interventions, is essential to reduce inequalities in access to care and to ensure that all pregnant women receive the necessary monitoring.

The analysis of the intervention models used by obstetric nurses also highlighted that practices such as cognitive behavioral therapy, social support, and parenting skills development are effective tools in preventing and managing postpartum depression. Such models allow women to develop coping skills and create stronger bonds with their babies, promoting better adaptation to motherhood and reducing the effects of depression.

In this way, the research objectives were achieved, demonstrating the essential role of nursing.

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obstetric practice in health education and prevention of postpartum depression. Analysis of the data and intervention models used by professionals showed that educational practices, when implemented appropriately, have a positive impact on reducing postpartum depression rates, providing more humanized care focused on women's needs during the perinatal period.

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