

Chapter

Maternal Psychological Well-Being

Tesfahun Simon Hadaro and Habtamu Alemu Tena

Abstract

Maternal psychological well-being is a critical determinant of health outcomes for mothers and their children, encompassing emotional, mental, and social dimensions of health during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period. This chapter explores the multifaceted concept of maternal psychological well-being, examining its biological, psychological, social, and cultural determinants. Hormonal fluctuations, physical health, pre-existing mental health conditions, self-efficacy, and social support systems all play pivotal roles in shaping maternal mental health. The consequences of poor psychological well-being are far-reaching, impacting mothers' physical recovery, children's behavioral and cognitive development, and family dynamics. Interventions, including cognitive-behavioral therapy, mindfulness-based approaches, peer support programs, and policy measures such as maternity leave and integrated mental health care, are effective in promoting maternal mental health. Drawing on global trends and evidence from Ethiopia, this chapter emphasizes the need for a multidisciplinary approach to address maternal psychological well-being, recognizing its centrality to maternal and child health outcomes.

Keywords: mental health, postpartum depression, pregnancy, self-efficacy, social support

1. Introduction

The biological process of childbirth brings about a range of physiological, emotional, psychological, and physical transformations that deeply impact women [1]. These changes extend beyond the individuals directly involved, shaping the sociocultural context as well. Moreover, they can influence health outcomes for both mother and child [2]. While maternity care in wealthy nations is generally considered safe, maternal psychological well-being remains a significant challenge, deeply impacting the health and well-being of women during the childbirth process.

Maternal psychological well-being is a cornerstone of maternal health, significantly influencing the overall health and development of mothers and their children [3]. It involves the emotional, mental, and social dimensions of health, which are critical during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period [4, 5]. This phase of life presents unique challenges, including hormonal changes, physical discomfort, and societal expectations, all of which impact maternal mental health [6]. Understanding maternal psychological well-being is crucial because it determines a mother's ability to cope with these demands, influencing not only her personal quality

of life but also the developmental trajectory of her children [7]. This chapter provides a comprehensive exploration of maternal psychological well-being by defining the concept, identifying its determinants, examining its consequences, and proposing interventions to enhance maternal mental health.

Maternal psychological well-being refers to the overall mental and emotional health of women during their maternal journey, including pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period. It reflects the ability of mothers to manage stress, maintain emotional balance, and fulfill their parenting roles effectively [8]. According to the World Health Organization, maternal psychological well-being includes the absence of mental health disorders, such as depression and anxiety, as well as the presence of positive mental states like emotional resilience and happiness [9, 10].

Globally, maternal psychological distress is a widespread issue, with an estimated 10–15% of women experiencing postpartum depression [9]. Factors such as poverty, gender inequality, and inadequate healthcare systems exacerbate the prevalence of maternal mental health issues in low- and middle-income countries [11, 12]. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that approximately 10% of pregnant women and 13% of postpartum women suffer from mental health disorders, with depression being the most common. In low- and middle-income countries, these rates are even higher, affecting up to 20% of women [5]. When left untreated, maternal mental health conditions significantly increase the risk of maternal mortality, especially in areas with inadequate healthcare services.

Maternal psychological well-being is influenced by cultural practices, economic challenges, and limited access to mental health services [13]. Studies have found that postpartum depression affects approximately 20% of mothers in rural areas, highlighting the need for community-based interventions [14]. Traditional support systems, such as extended families, play a vital role, but stigma and lack of awareness about mental health remain significant barriers to care [15].

Maternal psychological well-being encompasses several dimensions, which include: Emotional health refers to a mother's ability to regulate her emotions effectively, recover from stress, and maintain a positive outlook. Stress from lifestyle changes, health complications, and the anticipation of labor can all contribute to maternal anxiety. This can affect sleep patterns, appetite, and overall emotional regulation. Also, stress-induced cortisol production can interfere with fetal brain development, affecting cognitive and emotional outcomes for the child [16]. Pregnancy and motherhood bring hormonal fluctuations that may trigger mood swings or heightened emotional sensitivity, emphasizing the need for robust emotional health [17].

Cognitive changes, such as difficulties with memory or concentration, coping and self-efficacy, are common during pregnancy, labor and postpartum [2, 18]. Known colloquially as “pregnancy brain,” these changes can affect a mother's ability to make decisions and solve problems, impacting her overall psychological well-being [19]. Social well-being is influenced by a mother's ability to maintain healthy relationships and seek support [20]. Strong social networks, including relationships with partners, family, and friends, provide emotional and practical support, buffering against stress and enhancing psychological resilience [2, 21].

2. Determinants of maternal psychological well-being

The well-being of mothers is shaped by a range of biological, psychological, social, and cultural factors that interact dynamically [1]. Recognizing these determinants is

essential for designing targeted interventions. Biological determinants of maternal psychological well-being include hormonal changes and physical health. Pregnancy and the postpartum period involve significant hormonal fluctuations, particularly in estrogen and progesterone levels, which can affect mood regulation. For example, postpartum hormonal shifts are linked to mood disorders such as postpartum depression [22]. Physical health also plays a pivotal role, as conditions like anemia, gestational diabetes, or preeclampsia increase the risk of psychological distress.

Psychological factors, including pre-existing mental health conditions and self-efficacy, greatly influence maternal psychological well-being [2]. Women with a history of depression or anxiety are more vulnerable to experiencing mental health issues during and after pregnancy [23]. Additionally, self-efficacy, or the belief in one's ability to manage parenting responsibilities, serves as a protective factor. High self-efficacy enhances confidence and reduces stress, promoting overall mental well-being [3, 24].

Social determinants, such as the availability of support networks and socioeconomic conditions, are critical for maternal mental health [25]. Emotional and practical support from partners, family, and peers has been shown to mitigate stress and reduce the risk of postpartum depression. On the other hand, financial insecurity, unemployment, and limited access to healthcare services are significant stressors that negatively impact maternal well-being [25].

Cultural norms and societal expectations regarding motherhood significantly affect maternal psychological well-being. In many cultures, including Ethiopia, extended family networks often provide crucial support to new mothers. However, cultural stigmas surrounding mental health may prevent women from seeking help, exacerbating psychological distress [26].

3. Consequences of maternal psychological well-being

The psychological health of mothers directly influences their physical recovery, emotional stability, and overall quality of life. Poor maternal mental health, such as untreated postpartum depression, is associated with chronic fatigue, loss of appetite, and difficulties in bonding with the newborn [27]. These challenges can lead to feelings of inadequacy and guilt, further compounding mental distress.

Maternal mental health has profound implications for child development. Research has consistently shown that children of mothers with poor psychological well-being are at an increased risk of behavioral problems, cognitive delays, and insecure attachments. For example, maternal depression can lead to reduced sensitivity in caregiving, affecting the child's emotional and social development [28, 29]. Maternal psychological well-being also affects family dynamics. Strained relationships with partners, decreased communication, and conflicts may arise when mothers experience psychological distress. This can create a ripple effect, negatively impacting the family's overall cohesion and emotional climate.

4. Interventions to promote maternal psychological well-being

Promoting maternal psychological well-being requires a multifaceted approach that addresses individual, social, and systemic factors. Psychological therapies, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), are effective in treating maternal depression and anxiety. CBT helps mothers identify and change negative thought patterns, fostering

emotional resilience. Similarly, mindfulness-based interventions, which focus on present-moment awareness, have been shown to reduce stress and improve mood in mothers.

Social support initiatives, such as peer support groups and home visits, provide practical and emotional assistance to mothers. Programs like the Nurse-Family Partnership, which pairs nurses with new mothers, have demonstrated success in improving maternal mental health and parenting outcomes. At the policy level, initiatives such as paid maternity leave and affordable childcare can alleviate stress and enhance maternal well-being. Additionally, integrating mental health services into primary healthcare ensures early detection and treatment of maternal mental health disorders, particularly in low-resource settings.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

Maternal psychological well-being is a vital aspect of maternal and child health that deserves greater attention. It encompasses emotional, cognitive, and social factors that influence a mother's ability to navigate the challenges of pregnancy, childbirth, and parenting. Various elements, such as hormonal shifts, social and economic support, healthcare accessibility, and cultural norms, significantly impact a mother's mental health.

When mothers experience good psychological health, they are better equipped to form strong bonds with their children, fostering positive developmental outcomes. On the other hand, poor maternal mental health—such as postpartum depression or anxiety—can hinder self-care, parenting practices, and the emotional and cognitive development of children.

To improve maternal and child outcomes, it is essential to focus on early detection, holistic support systems, and interventions tailored to mothers' diverse needs and circumstances. By addressing the biological, psychological, social, and cultural determinants of maternal mental health, it is possible to improve outcomes for mothers, children, and families. A collaborative approach involving healthcare providers, policymakers, and community support systems is essential to creating an environment that promotes the psychological well-being of mothers like

- Embed mental health evaluations within routine prenatal and postnatal care to detect and address psychological challenges early.
- Strengthen community initiatives that provide emotional and social support, including maternal peer groups and mentorship programs.
- Equip healthcare workers with the skills to identify and manage maternal mental health issues, ensuring culturally appropriate care.
- Advocate for policies addressing the social and economic factors affecting maternal mental health, such as paid maternity leave, accessible childcare, and financial support.
- Launch public campaigns to highlight the significance of maternal mental health and combat stigma surrounding mental health conditions.
- Support ongoing research to examine the long-term impacts of maternal psychological well-being on children and assess the effectiveness of interventions.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Arba Minch University for providing access to its internet facilities, which greatly supported our chapter and academic endeavors. We acknowledge AI tools, including ChatGPT by OpenAI, for preparing this manuscript for tasks such as language editing, grammar correction, and enhancing clarity.

Ethics approval and consent

Not applicable.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Competing interests


The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Author details

Tesfahun Simon Hadaro* and Habtamu Alemu Tena
Department of Midwifery Medicine and Health Science College, Arba Minch
University, Arba Minch, Ethiopia

*Address all correspondence to: tesfu.2633@gmail.com

IntechOpen

© 2025 The Author(s). Licensee IntechOpen. This chapter is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. 

References

- [1] Salomonsson B et al. Self-efficacy beliefs and fear of childbirth in nulliparous women. *Journal of Psychosomatic Obstetrics and Gynecology*. 2013;**34**(3):116-121
- [2] Simon T et al. Childbirth self-efficacy and its associated factors among pregnant women in Arba Minch town, southern Ethiopia, 2023: A cross-sectional study. *Journal of Pregnancy*. 2024;**2024**(1):6478172
- [3] Schwartz L et al. Factors associated with childbirth self-efficacy in Australian childbearing women. *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*. 2015;**15**:1-9
- [4] Meyer EC et al. Family-based intervention improves maternal psychological well-being and feeding interaction of preterm infants. *Pediatrics*. 1994;**93**(2):241-246
- [5] WHO. Guide for Integration of Perinatal Mental Health in Maternal and Child Health Services. Geneva: WHO; 2022
- [6] Guyon-Harris KL, Bogen DL, Huth-Bocks AC. Maternal psychological well-being and infant emergency department utilization. *Academic Pediatrics*. 2021;**21**(5):885-891
- [7] Navon-Eyal M, Taubman-Ben-Ari O. Psychological well-being during pregnancy: The contribution of stress factors and maternal-fetal bonding. *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology*. 2023;**38**:1-15
- [8] Steen M, Francisco AA. Maternal Mental Health and Wellbeing. Brasil: SciELO; 2019. pp. III-IVI
- [9] WHO. Report on Surveillance of Antibiotic Consumption: 2016-2018 Early Implementation. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018
- [10] Nicole J. Maternal Care and Mental Health. John Bowlby, MA. Geneva: World Health Organization. 1951. p. 179. *Journal of Mental Science*. 1952;**98**(412):491-491
- [11] Herba CM et al. Maternal depression and mental health in early childhood: An examination of underlying mechanisms in low-income and middle-income countries. *The Lancet Psychiatry*. 2016;**3**(10):983-992
- [12] Gausman J et al. Adversity, social capital, and mental distress among mothers of small children: A cross-sectional study in three low and middle-income countries. *PLoS One*. 2020;**15**(1):e0228435
- [13] Thai A. Exploring Sociocultural Influences on Maternal Mental Health: Impacts, Challenges, and Interventions. Thailand; 2024
- [14] Belay A et al. Evaluation of the prevalence and risk factors of perinatal depression among women living with HIV in the Amhara region, Northwest Ethiopia. *Heliyon*. 2024;**10**(19):15-20
- [15] Corrigan PW, Druss BG, Perlick DA. The impact of mental illness stigma on seeking and participating in mental health care. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*. 2014;**15**(2):37-70
- [16] Hanlon CA et al. Psychological risk factors predictive of suicidal distress in men receiving a community-based brief psychological intervention. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*. 2024;**54**(3):394-404
- [17] Field T. The effects of mother's physical and emotional unavailability

on emotion regulation. Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development. 1994;**59**(2-3):208-227

[18] Abebe M et al. Fear of childbirth and its associated factors among pregnant women in East Africa: Systematic review and meta-analysis. Midwifery. 2024;(139):104191

[19] Field AP, Wilcox RR. Robust statistical methods: A primer for clinical psychology and experimental psychopathology researchers. Behaviour Research and Therapy. 2017;**98**:19-38

[20] Mustaffa MS et al. Social support during pre-natal and post-natal stage: Influence on maternal depression and mental well-being. Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences. 2014;**143**:417-422

[21] Tani F, Castagna V. Maternal social support, quality of birth experience, and post-partum depression in primiparous women. The Journal of Maternal-Fetal and Neonatal Medicine. 2017;**30**(6):689-692

[22] Schiller CE, Meltzer-Brody S, Rubinow DR. The role of reproductive hormones in postpartum depression. CNS Spectrums. 2015;**20**(1):48-59

[23] Korja R et al. Trajectories of maternal depressive and anxiety symptoms and child's socio-emotional outcome during early childhood. Journal of Affective Disorders. 2024;**349**:625-634

[24] Tilden EL et al. The effect of childbirth self-efficacy on perinatal outcomes. Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic and Neonatal Nursing. 2016;**45**(4):465-480

[25] Bedaso A et al. The relationship between social support and mental health problems during pregnancy: A systematic review and meta-analysis. Reproductive Health. 2021;**18**:1-23

[26] Habte A et al. The prevalence of respectful maternity care during childbirth and its determinants in Ethiopia: A systematic review and meta-analysis. PLoS One. 2022;**17**(11):e0277889

[27] O'Hara MW, Wisner KL. Perinatal mental illness: Definition, description and aetiology. Best Practice and Research Clinical Obstetrics and Gynaecology. 2014;**28**(1):3-12

[28] Goelman H et al. Maternal mental health, child care quality, and children's behavior. Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology. 2014;**35**(4):347-356

[29] Phua DY, Kee MZ, Meaney MJ. Positive maternal mental health, parenting, and child development. Biological Psychiatry. 2020;**87**(4):328-337