

Contextualising a non-indigenous illness: An African perspective on postpartum depression

Background and Objectives: Despite growing recognition of the importance of psychological well-being during the postpartum period in South African research, a deeper and more critical reflection reveals a disheartening gap: there is a significant lack of studies focusing specifically on African women and their subjective, culturally grounded experiences of postpartum depression. This highlights the urgent need for a sociocultural conceptualisation of postpartum depression that reflects African worldviews and lived realities. Against this backdrop, the present paper finds its relevance. It aims to explore the lived experiences of African women diagnosed with this condition, using an Afrocentric lens grounded in Africana Womanism to frame the study.

Methods: Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed thematically.

Results: Findings shows that participants interpreted their struggles through their own cultural frameworks, often attributing causes to spiritual forces such as ancestral displeasure or witchcraft. Notably, many participants hesitated to accept the biomedical label of 'postpartum depression', preferring definitions that align with African conceptions of motherhood and well-being. Consequently, many women refrained from seeking adequate formal healthcare for their condition.

Conclusion: This study underscores the need for culturally competent psychological interventions and a holistic treatment approach that integrates both indigenous knowledge systems and Western medical practices in diagnosing and treating postpartum depression.