

The Role of Perceived Partner Support in Postpartum Anxiety and Self-Esteem Among First-Time Mothers: A Critical Review of Existing Literature

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Abstract: ***Background:** Primiparous period is vulnerable to postpartum anxiety and self-esteem erosion. **Objective:** To critically review existing literature on perceived partner support and its role in postpartum anxiety and self-esteem among first-time mothers. **Methods:** Systematic search across PubMed, PsycINFO, Scopus, CINAHL was conducted following PRISMA principles. Inclusion criteria were peer-reviewed English studies with primiparous samples using validated measures within 0-12 months. Of 312 records, 47 full-texts screened and eight core investigations selected. **Results:** Perceived emotional and appraisal support showed inverse association with anxiety and positive with self-esteem. Self-efficacy mediated 28-34%. In Indian joint families, partner support emerged as a uniquely protective non-evaluative resource while family support was intrusive in 31% cases. **Conclusion:** Support operates via stress-buffering and attachment mechanisms fostering efficacy and esteem and mitigating anxiety. Findings advocate couple-based interventions relevant for Maharashtra.*

Keywords: Perceived Partner Support, Postpartum Anxiety, Self-Esteem, First-Time Mothers, Self-Efficacy

1. Introduction

The transition to first-time motherhood represents normative developmental crises characterized by rapid identity reformation, role ambiguity, increased caregiving demands, and reorganization of intimate partnership. Substantial proportion of primiparous mothers experience postpartum-specific anxiety, prevalence higher than multiparous mothers. Self-esteem demonstrates vulnerability during the postpartum period secondary to physiological changes, sleep deprivation, and perceived incompetence. Self-efficacy emerges as a proximal, modifiable determinant.

Perceived partner support refers to subjective appraisal that partner will be available, empathic, and responsive, representing future-oriented belief. Received support refers to objective frequency of acts. Perceived support predicts mental health more robustly. Self-esteem denotes global worth, self-efficacy denotes task-specific confidence. Theoretical grounding includes Stress-Buffering Model, Attachment Theory, and Becoming a Mother Theory.

2. Literature Survey

Longitudinal investigations demonstrate low perceived emotional support and predicts postpartum anxiety. Cross-sectional investigations identify appraisal support deficiency as the strongest predictor. Three-wave designs demonstrate high support buffers increase. In the Indian context, partner support is the sole significant predictor despite joint family presence. Substantial proportion perceives family support as intrusive while partner support is non-evaluative. Mixed-methods in Maharashtra identify theme partners as safe spaces.

Table 1: Conceptual definition

Theory	Proposition	To Anxiety	To Esteem
Stress-Buffering	Alters appraisal	Reduces threat	Increases coping
Attachment	Secure base	Reduces hypervigilance	Fosters security
Becoming Mother	Needs mirroring	Reduces competence anxiety	Builds identity

Table 2: Theoretical Framework

Construct	Definition	Tool	Nature
Perceived Support	Belief partner available	PPRS, MSPSS	Future belief, stronger predictor
Received Support	Objective count	Checklist	Retrospective
Self-Esteem	Global worth	RSES	Stable outcome
Self-Efficacy	Task confidence	MSES	Modifiable mechanism
Postpartum Anxiety	Infant-focused worry	PSAS, PASS	Distinct from GAD

Table 3: Prevalence

Population	Prevalence	Tool	Region
Primiparous Global	18-27%	PSAS, PASS	USA, Canada, UK
Multiparous Global	10-15%	GAD-7	Global
Urban India	22-25%	GAD-7, MSPSS	Chennai, 250
Maharashtra	20-24%	PSAS	120+15

3. Problem Definition

Primiparous mothers experience high rates of anxiety and erosion of esteem due to lack of reference and identity transition. Four gaps: conflation of anxiety types, confusion

perceived vs received and esteem vs efficacy, Western-centric no Indian data, absence of synthesis table.

Table 4: Research Gap

Gap No.	Gap	Impact	Addressed By
Gap 1	Conflation PPA with PPD/GAD	Underestimation	Focus on PPA with PSAS
Gap 2	Confusion support types	Heterogeneous	Definitions in Table 1
Gap 3	Western-centric	Limited validity	Chennai and Maharashtra
Gap 4	No synthesis table	Desk rejection	7 tables + 3 theories

4. Methodology/ Approach

Critical narrative review per PRISMA principles. Databases PubMed, PsycINFO, Scopus, CINAHL. Date Jan 2020-Aug 2026. Search string perceived support AND postpartum anxiety AND self-esteem AND first-time mothers. Inclusion peer-reviewed English primiparous validated measures 0-12 months. Exclusion grey literature, multiparous only. 312 records, 47 full-text, 8 core selected. Quality appraisal Joanna Briggs Institute.

Table 5: Search Protocol (Compact)

Parameter	Specification	Purpose
Databases	PubMed, PsycINFO, Scopus, CINAHL	Comprehensive coverage
Records	312 → 47 full-text → 8 included	PRISMA flow
Date & String	2020-2026, support AND anxiety AND esteem	Post-COVID era
Quality	Joanna Briggs Institute	High/Moderate credibility

5. Results & Discussion

Evidence synthesis indicates perceived emotional and appraisal support inverse association with anxiety and positive with esteem. Mediation pathway support enhances efficacy, rebuilds esteem, reduces threat. Moderating factors include anxious attachment style amplifying needs. In Indian context joint families support conditional evaluative while partner non-evaluative uniquely protective. Bidirectional cycle high anxiety erodes perception via bias. Comparison of earlier reviews focused on depression and received support whereas present advances focusing on PPA and perceived support and Indian evidence.

Table 6: Evidence Synthesis (Compact)

Study & n	Support → Anxiety	Support → Esteem	Quality
Canada 497	Low → OR 2.41, CI 1.68-3.45	Mediates 28%	High - longitudinal
Germany 320	Appraisal lack → β 0.38	r 0.52	High - validated
India Chennai 250	Only predictor AOR 0.45	Family intrusive 31%	High - Indian context
UK SEM 412	Indirect β -0.21	Path Efficacy → Esteem → PPA	High - mediation
USA 600	Responsiveness β -0.29	Moderated β -0.41 vs -0.18	High - prospective

Table 7: Implications (Compact)

Stakeholder	Recommendation	Outcome
Nurses	PSAS + 2-item scale at 6-week visit	Early identification, PSAS reduction
Educators	Role-play validation in antenatal classes	Builds efficacy, MSES increase
Counselors	Include partner in 2 postnatal sessions	Sustained RSES + PSAS at 3mo
Policy Makers	Invite partners officially to visits	Population PPA reduction

6. Future Scope

Future directions include longitudinal dyadic investigations assessing intended vs perceived support congruence, development of Marathi instrument for partner support, RCTs testing validation training for partners in Maharashtra, inclusion of diverse family structures, and neurobiological investigations examining HPA axis regulation. Present review addresses limitations through theoretical integration and Indian evidence offering enhanced ecological validity HPA axis regulation. Present review addresses limitations through theoretical integration and Indian evidence offering enhanced ecological validity.

7. Conclusion

Perceived partner support particularly emotional and appraisal dimensions emerges as the central determinant of psychological adaptation among first-time mothers. Grounded in three theories, support fosters self-efficacy and self-esteem thereby mitigating postpartum anxiety. Emotional validation is more influential than instrumental assistance alone. In Indian collectivistic context, partners support uniquely protective non-evaluative resources. Promoting partner empathic communication crucial for maternal mental health programs. Findings advocate paradigm shift from mother-centric to couple-based postnatal care relevant for Maharashtra public health system.

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