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Effectiveness of Interpersonal Communication Strategy in the Management of Postpartum Depression in Southeast, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the effectiveness of interpersonal communication strategy in the management of postpartum depression in Southeast Nigeria. The patient-centered care model was used as the theoretical framework. The study made use of mixed method design with a population of 1,343,255 and 9000 for survey and IDI respectively from which 385 and 10 were derived as the sample sizes through the use of survey monkey online sample size calculator and purposive decision. The snowball and purposive sampling techniques were used in the study. The data was analysed with the use of simple percentage. Results showed that 39.7% of the respondents confirmed that the extent PPD mothers are exposed to interpersonal communication strategy is low that 42.7% of respondents indicated that interpersonal communication strategy is in managing PPD among nursing mothers is less effective. It was concluded that nursing mothers in southeast Nigeria are exposed to interpersonal communication strategy to a low extent and perhaps the low extent could be responsible for the attitudinal disposition of nursing mothers within the southeast Nigeria extraction towards interpersonal communication strategy and by extension the reason for its level of effectiveness in managing postpartum depression among nursing mothers. It was recommended that Nursing mothers need to be encouraged to expose themselves to interpersonal communication because of what they stand to get by availing themselves to the information. Efforts need to be made by all stakeholders with the aim of promoting the level of effectiveness of interpersonal communication strategy in managing the PPD issue.

Keywords: Postpartum depression, mothers, strategy, interpersonal communication



Introduction

Postpartum depression (PPD) is a mental illness that can last up to a year after childbirth and is characterised by feelings of melancholy and indifference during the first four weeks of delivery (Lim, 2021). Approximately one in seven new mothers worldwide suffer from postpartum depression, with an estimated frequency of 17.7% in the first year after giving birth (Abba et al., 2023). While PPD is more common in African nations than in high-income environments, its prevalence varies. Rates in different sub-geographical regions of Nigeria have been reported to range from 10.7% to 44.39% (Slomian et al., 2019).

Giving birth may be a happy and fulfilling experience for the majority of women. On the other hand, some women's mental health may be negatively impacted by childbirth, which can cause feelings like guilt, anger, sadness, anxiety, and despair (Tungchama et al., 2018; Odinka et al., 2018). Since the birth of a child is a time of pleasure and celebration rather than despair, postpartum depression is a highly significant disorder among mothers that goes mostly unnoticed. The optimal maternal care a mother is expected to offer for her infant and the overall well-being of the family, including her husband's tranquility, will undoubtedly not be produced in a society full of depressed mothers (Wang et al., 2023).

Having a child, particularly their first child, is a major life adjustment for the majority of women. There may be emotional turmoil throughout the first few weeks and months after giving birth. According to Tungchama et al. (2018), the nursing mother tries to meet her baby's demands, adjust to the changes in her sleep schedule, and heal physically from the delivery process. Hormonal fluctuations, exhaustion, and the discomfort of incisions, swollen breasts, or sensitive nipples may all contribute to the intensity of their emotions. Even in households with relatively high incomes, the postpartum period frequently results in increased financial hardship and entails changes in marital and family relationships (Tsigah-Ahmed et al. 2024). This is especially true for low socioeconomic class households.

In a circumstance like this, the victims want assistance in order to get over their depression. Interpersonal communication therapy can be used as a way to assist postpartum depression victims in situations such as these. A key component of medical practice is effective interpersonal communication (Frank et al. 2015). Three objectives can be achieved through effective communication: promoting the sharing of information, fostering positive interpersonal relationships, including the development of trust, and allowing patients to participate in decision-making (Shao et al., 2018). Additionally, communication is a key component of respectful maternity care and a means of defending women's human rights, such as by guaranteeing confidentiality, granting informed consent, and fulfilling their right to complete information (Cometto, 2022).

Battling diseases including postpartum depression demands more than medicine; it requires the power of effective communication to help inform, educate, support, and improve health outcomes. Interpersonal communication between health workers and patients can affect health care outcomes, including patients' satisfaction, knowledge and understanding, adherence to treatment, quality of life and psychological and physical health. Similarly, in light of the surge in diverse health challenges confronting the world, the communication landscape is becoming indispensable in addressing and curtailing threats to human life and social well-being. Within maternal and newborn care (MNC), good interpersonal communication contributes to better experiences, improved respectful care and reduced mistreatment. However, despite the perceived good of interpersonal communication in health communication women are still suffering from postpartum depression. What could be the reason? Could it be that they are hardly exposed to interpersonal communication session with health experts or the interpersonal communication strategy is not effective in managing postpartum depression among nursing mothers in southeast, Nigeria. Hence, this study sought to investigate the effectiveness of interpersonal communication strategy for management



of postpartum depression in Southeast Nigeria. The main objective of this study is to examine the effectiveness of interpersonal communication strategy in the management of postpartum depression in southeast, Nigeria.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the extent postpartum depression mothers are exposed to interpersonal communication strategy.
2. Ascertain the perception of postpartum depression mothers towards interpersonal communication strategy in managing postpartum depression,
3. Examine postpartum depression mothers' behaviour towards interpersonal communication strategy in managing postpartum depression and
4. Find out how effective interpersonal communication strategy in managing postpartum depression among nursing mothers.

Theoretical Framework

The study was based on the patient-centered care model put forth by Stewart (1995), which puts the patient at the centre of healthcare rather than the disease. This approach emphasises open communication and collaboration between patients and providers, taking into account not only the medical condition but also the patient's individual needs, values, and emotional well-being. This empowers patients and aims to improve their satisfaction with care and positive health outcomes, which is more of a therapeutic alliance that helps to build a trusting and empathetic relationship between healthcare providers and patients. Physicians can establish rapport, trust, and shared understanding with postpartum patients by using the fundamentals of patient-centered communication theory in this study.

This model provides the basis for the understanding of the power of communication between healthcare provider and patients and that is why the researchers anchored the study on the model. This model is patient-centred, hence, if women with postpartum depression are cared for in line with the model postulation they are likely to improve from their condition.

Method

Research Design

The mixed method research design was used. This allowed for a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection. In the Quantitative method, the Survey research design was employed while in the qualitative method, the in-depth interview design was adopted. Survey method was chosen because it was considered appropriate as it involves sampling of opinion of nursing mothers in southeast Nigeria. On the other hand, for the purpose of collecting qualitative data, in-depth interview was used. An in-depth interview is an open-ended approach to obtain detailed information on a subject from respondents. This helped the researcher to explore the in-depth respondent's (health practitioners) points of view, experiences, feelings and perspectives on the issue under investigation.

Population

Considering that there is no existing document containing the actual figure of the population of pregnant women in southeast, the population was estimated by dividing that of Nigeria (9.2 million) Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey, (2018) by 36 plus FCT making it 37 and then sum of the population of the five southeastern states to give the population. Population of this study comprises nursing mothers in Southeast, Nigeria. The estimated population of nursing mothers in southeast, Nigeria is 1,343,255. Meanwhile, for the qualitative aspect of the study health practitioners particularly obstetricians and



gynecologists formed the population of the study. According to the Society of gynecologists and obstetricians of Nigeria (2023) there are 9000 gynecologists and obstetricians in Nigeria. Given that there is no available data for the practitioners in Southeast Nigeria the procedure the researcher used to get the population for the survey aspect of the study was adopted. That is to say the estimated population across the five southeast states is 1,216.

Sample Size/Sampling Technique

In determining the sample size, the researchers used the survey monkey at 95% confidence level and 5% error limit. Therefore the sample size is 385. Meanwhile, for the qualitative study the researcher purposively selected 10 key health experts across the states that is, two (2) from each state. Sampling Technique: To select the respondents for this study, the researchers made use of snowball sampling technique. The technique enable the researchers to recruit nursing mothers who are victims of PPD. Thereafter they were used to identify other nursing mothers who have similar case. This procedure was used until the required number of respondents was gotten. For the qualitative aspect of the study the purposive technique was used to select the health experts. The criteria for selection were that you must have handled at least a case of postpartum depression nursing mother.

Instrument of Data Collection

The researchers used questionnaire and in-depth interview guide as the instruments of data collection in the study. The questionnaire and interview guide were self-developed and were structured in line with the research objectives.

Validity/Reliability of Instruments

The face validity was adopted, here the researchers subjected the instruments to communication and media research experts for vetting, after which the corrections were implemented to ensure the instrument measure what it tends to measure. The test re-test method was used to check for reliability. The Cronbach alpha was used to check for internal consistency, the result showed a coefficient of .87 meaning the instrument is reliable. On the other hand, member checking was used for the test of trustworthiness of the in-depth interview guide instrument. After the procedure the instrument was certified reliable by the team who conducted the check.

Method of Data Collection and Analysis

Face-to-face approach was used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. This was done within a period of two months. The interview sessions lasted about 20-30 minutes per interviewee. The researchers used simple percentage for the quantitative analysis and the Yin's explanation building technique for the qualitative data analysis.

Findings

The section focuses on data presentation and analysis. The copies of questionnaire distributed to respondents 372 were retrieved in which the analysis of this study was based. The return rate stood at 96.6% which is ideal for analysis. The invalid copies amount to 3.4%.



Table 1: Respondents’ response on “are mothers exposed to interpersonal communication strategy by health practitioners”

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	372	100
No	-	-
Can’t say	-	-
Total	372	100

Source: Field survey, 2025

Analysis of data revealed that 100% of the respondents confirmed that they are exposed to interpersonal communication strategy by health practitioner. By implication of this finding, it then means that all the nursing mothers studied are exposed to interpersonal communication strategy by health practitioner.

Table 2: Respondents’ response on the extent PPD mothers are exposed to interpersonal communication strategy

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Very high extent	19	5.10
High extent	73	19.6
Moderate extent	110	29.5
Low extent	148	39.7
Very low extent	22	5.9
Total	372	100

Source: Field survey, 2025

Analysis of data revealed that 39.7% of the respondents confirmed that the extent PPD mothers are exposed to interpersonal communication strategy is low. By implication of this finding, it then means that many of the nursing mothers studied had low exposure to interpersonal communication strategy in managing PPD.

Table 3: Respondents’ response on the perception of postpartum depression mothers towards interpersonal communication strategy in managing postpartum depression

S/N	Item Statement	$\bar{X}$	Std. Dev.	Decision
1.	The conversation is usually lengthy	2.9	.86	Accept
2.	I think is just another way of collecting money from mothers	2.2	.87	Reject
3.	I see it as a good way of helping PPD nursing mothers	2.9	.82	Accept
4.	I think the conversation is therapeutic regardless its length	3.1	.89	Accept
Grand mean and standard deviation		2.7	0.86	

Source: Field survey, 2025

The results as presented in Table 3 above show that, respondents agreed to items 1,3 and 4 and disagreed to item 2 on the table with a mean range of 2.2 to 3.1. The grand mean rating of Table 3 is 2.7, which is agreeable and implies that the highlighted items on the tables are some of the perceptions nursing mothers’ have towards interpersonal communication strategy towards managing PPD in Southeast, Nigeria. The standard deviation ranged from .82 to .89, which showed that the respondents were not far from each other in their responses with regard to their responses on the perceptions nursing mothers’ have towards interpersonal communication strategy towards managing PPD in Southeast, Nigeria.



Table 4: Respondents' response on the behaviour of PPD mothers' towards interpersonal communication strategy towards managing PPD

S/N	Item Statement	$\bar{X}$	Std. Dev.	Decision
1.	I feel indifferent about it	3.0	.89	Accept
2.	Not comfortable to open up	2.8	.89	Accept
3.	Usually angry towards it	2.6	.81	Accept
4.	Not a good solution hence I still feel the same	2.4	.90	Reject
5.	It makes me feel good when I talk about it	2.5	.83	Accept
Grand mean and standard deviation		2.6	0.86	

Source: Field survey, 2025

The results as presented in Table 4 above show that, respondents agreed to items 1,2,3 and 5 and disagreed to item 4 on the table with a mean range of 2.4 to 3.0. The grand mean rating of Table 3 is 2.6, which is agreeable and implies that the highlighted items on the tables are some of the behaviours nursing mothers' exhibit towards interpersonal communication strategy towards managing PPD in Southeast, Nigeria. The standard deviation ranged from .81 to .90, which showed that the respondents were not far from each other in their responses with regard to their responses on the behaviours nursing mothers' exhibit towards interpersonal communication strategy towards managing PPD in Southeast, Nigeria.

Table 5: Respondents' response on the how effective is interpersonal communication strategy is in managing PPD among nursing mothers

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Very effective	29	7.7
Effective	53	14.2
Moderate	97	26.0
Less effective	159	42.7
Not effective	33	8.8
Total	372	100

Source: Field survey, 2025

Analysis of data showed that 42.7% of respondents indicated that interpersonal communication strategy is in managing PPD among nursing mothers is less effective. This implies that the respondents confirmed that interpersonal communication strategy is in managing PPD among nursing mothers is less effective.

Summary of Qualitative Data

To what extent postpartum depression mothers are exposed to interpersonal communication strategy?

It is quite unfortunate that most women don't know that they can seek help from health experts to help them overcome postpartum depression. Another said, exposure level is not encouraging; maybe we need to tell about this service more to women. Responding to the question, another interviewee stressed that regardless the prevalent of this issue you hardly see women suffering from this thing coming for counseling. Oh yes, it is quite disturbing that the exposure is poor considering the rate at which new moms suffer from it. From these responses from participants it is obvious that the exposure is very low.



What is the perception of postpartum depression mothers towards interpersonal communication strategy in managing postpartum depression?

They may see it as not necessary, trust Nigerian new mothers. How many people come for one on one counseling? You see that is rare, perhaps it is because of the way they are seeing it. If it is in the developed world where they take mental health very seriously you will see patients booking for them to be counsel. Well, people are different; some who are quite exposed will have positive perception about it unlike those with less exposure. For example I heard one woman saying why she would be coming for counseling because her baby is crying that it is normal or that her body is changing slowly. So, you see! Meanwhile, some see it as one of the best remedy in helping nursing mothers manage the situation. From the responses one can deduce the vary perceptions of postpartum depression mothers on interpersonal communication strategy in managing postpartum depression as reported by the health experts.

What is the behaviour of postpartum depression mothers' towards interpersonal communication strategy in managing postpartum depression?

At times these women do not carry out the things we tell them during counseling for reasons best known to them. Some of them when they approach you it is difficult for them to talk which I don't know why. For me, I usually see hesitancy in them and when I notice that I try to make them more relax to enable me dig deeper. While some feel comfortable some don't so in such situation will try to manage the situation to enable us get the best result. Oh yes, you know our mothers very well, some show less concern about their health even though you are seeing depression written all over their faces. It is a trend that is quite disturbing because it can be fatal most times if proper care is not taken. From the responses one can see the varying behaviours of nursing mothers as reported by health practitioners.

How effective is interpersonal communication strategy in managing postpartum depression among nursing mothers?

Well, nursing mothers hardly come for counseling therapy so it will be difficult to say whether it is effective or not. Another of the respondent noted that "one method may not be enough to manage issues as serious as postpartum depression." Well, we are trying our best but it seems we need to add another strategy because of the reported cases we receive of postpartum depression mothers. So, from my assessment or rating I will give the method five over ten because we are having cases of relapse reported. Well, to me in all sincerity is not so effective in this our region maybe because of how frequent the strategy is used. From the responses on can see that the interpersonal communication strategy in managing postpartum depression among nursing mothers is not so effective

Discussion

Findings from analysed data revealed that nursing mothers are exposed to interpersonal communication strategy however, regarding the extent of exposure Table 2 showed the extent of exposure to be low with a percentage of 39.7. Thirty-nine point seven percent of the respondents confirmed that the extent PPD mothers are exposed to interpersonal communication strategy is low. What this means is that many of the nursing mothers studied had low exposure to interpersonal communication strategy in managing PPD. From the qualitative findings the exposure is poor as seen these responses: "another interviewee stressed that regardless the prevalent of this issue you hardly see women suffering from this thing coming for counseling. Oh yes, it is quite disturbing that the exposure is poor considering the rate at which new moms suffer from it." This low exposure could be as a result of lack of interest in interpersonal communication strategy. In the study of Olde et al. (2023) if women are exposed to interpersonal communication strategies it will facilitate exchange of information, creating a good interpersonal relationship (n =57), and/or enabling the inclusion of women and partners in the decision making. Also, Slomian et al. (2019) in their study revealed that poor exposure to treatment can lead to both the infant



and the maternal consequences and that postpartum depression creates an environment that is not conducive to the personal development of mothers or the optimal development of a child. According to the theoretical framework patient-centered care model open communication will enable patients get help from health experts.

The results showed that, respondents agreed to items 1,3 and 4 and disagreed to item 2 on the table (Table 3) with a mean range of 2.2 to 3.1. The grand mean rating of Table 3 is 2.7, which is agreeable and implies that the highlighted items on the tables are some of the perceptions nursing mothers' have towards interpersonal communication strategy towards managing PPD in Southeast, Nigeria. The standard deviation ranged from .82 to .89, which showed that the respondents were not far from each other in their responses with regard to their responses on the perceptions nursing mothers' have towards interpersonal communication strategy towards managing PPD in Southeast, Nigeria. The qualitative findings share similarities with the quantitative findings as seen in their responses "They may see it as not necessary, trust Nigerian new mothers. How many people come for one on one counseling? You see that is rare, perhaps it is because of the way they are seeing it. If it is in the developed world where they take mental health very seriously you will see patients booking for them to be counsel. Well, people are different; some who are quite exposed will have positive perception about it unlike those with less exposure." Grisbrook, et al (2022) revealed that PPD is linked to reduced quality of parent-child interaction, and adverse effects on maternal and child health as such new mothers' perceptions of more negative childbirth experiences, such as unplanned/emergency C-sections, are linked to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which in turn is related to PPD. Also, Tsiga-Ahmed et al (2024) revealed that poor social support and high perceived stress increased the risk of.

On the other hand, results as presented in Table 4 showed that, respondents agreed to items 1,2,3 and 5 and disagreed to item 4 on the table with a mean range of 2.4 to 3.0. The grand mean rating of Table 3 is 2.6, which is agreeable and implies that the highlighted items on (Table 4) are some of the behaviours nursing mothers' exhibit towards interpersonal communication strategy towards managing PPD in Southeast, Nigeria. The standard deviation ranged from .81 to .90, which showed that the respondents were not far from each other in their responses with regard to their responses on the behaviours nursing mothers' exhibit towards interpersonal communication strategy towards managing PPD in Southeast, Nigeria. The qualitative findings share similarities with the quantitative findings as seen in their responses "At times these women do not carry out the things we tell them during counseling for reasons best known to them. Some of them when they approach you it is difficult for them to talk which I don't know why. For me, I usually see hesitancy in them and when I notice that I try to make them more relax to enable me dig deeper. While some feel comfortable some don't so in such situation will try to manage the situation to enable us get the best result." When such behaviours are put out it becomes difficult to manage issue as serious as postpartum depression. Perhaps, their behaviours could be linked to poor awareness on the efficacy of interpersonal communication in managing mental health issues. Place et al. (2024) study revealed that PPD condition is a serious public health concern, but were faced with numerous barriers from the institutional, organizational, and community level that hindered their ability to recognize and manage PPD in a timely manner. Also, Shitu et al. (2019) in their study revealed that women who exhibit negative behaviour to health practices suffer from postpartum depression and that integration of mental illness with maternal and child health care is important to cause behavioral change of postpartum depression mothers.

Lastly, findings revealed that 42.7% of respondents indicated that interpersonal communication strategy is in managing PPD among nursing mothers is less effective. This implies that the respondents confirmed that interpersonal communication strategy is in managing PPD among nursing mothers in southeast Nigeria is less effective. Obviously, the poor exposure and attitude could be responsible for the level of



effectiveness of interpersonal communication strategy in managing PPD among nursing mothers. The qualitative findings are also in consonance with the quantitative findings as seen in their responses: “Well, nursing mothers hardly come for counseling therapy so it will be difficult to say whether it is effective or not. Another of the respondent noted that “one method may not be enough to manage issues as serious as postpartum depression.” Well, we are trying our best but it seems we need to add another strategy because of the reported cases we receive of postpartum depression mothers. So, from my assessment or rating I will give the method five over ten because we are having cases of relapse reported.” Olde et al (2023) study revealed that effective interpersonal communication is essential to provide respectful and quality maternal and newborn care (MNC). However, the attitudinal disposition of nursing mothers regarding interpersonal communication strategy may strongly be the reason of its failure in managing the issue of PPD. In such situation, the theoretical model used in this study will not work.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In line with the findings, it was therefore concluded that nursing mothers in southeast Nigeria are exposed to interpersonal communication strategy to a low extent and perhaps the low extent could be responsible for the behavioural disposition of nursing mothers within the southeast Nigeria extraction towards interpersonal communication strategy and by extension the reason for its level of effectiveness in managing postpartum depression among nursing mothers, The following recommendations are put forward:

1. Nursing mothers need to be encouraged to expose themselves to interpersonal communication because of what they stand to get by availing themselves to the information.
2. Efforts should be made by health expert through fear appeal to nursing mothers so as to correct their negative perception about the interpersonal communication strategy use in managing postpartum depression.
3. Nursing mothers need series of health sensitization with the aim of correcting their behavioural disposition regarding interpersonal communication strategy towards managing PPD.
4. Efforts need to be made by all stakeholders with the aim of promoting the level of effectiveness of interpersonal communication strategy in managing the PPD issue.

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