

## Qualitative study - other

# Transitioning to motherhood under COVID-19 lockdown—challenges and silver linings

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## Implications for practice and research

- Improved communication tailored to mothers' needs, birthing plans to incorporate choices and professional postnatal support are required.
- Research involving ethnic minority families and lone parents establishing the impact of COVID-19 to inform a health systems approach for developing healthcare services.

## Context

The COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted mothers globally as a population and left them unsupported. The transition to motherhood can cause crisis and difficulty.<sup>1</sup> Internationally, prepandemic investment in maternal and child health was sought to support mothers and enhance quality of care; this remains more urgent.<sup>2–6</sup> Despite this, several structures and processes were withdrawn or provided in a reduced capacity during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>5,6</sup> Grey and Barnett<sup>5</sup> identify challenges and unexpected silver linings of giving birth during lockdown, secondary to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Methods

Grey and Barnett<sup>5</sup> conducted a qualitative study, using semistructured interviews with 10 first-time mothers who gave birth during the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim was to explore the impact of lockdown on birth experiences and early days of new motherhood. Data collection methods were adapted due to the pandemic. Sampling techniques used a social media platform 'Facebook' to recruit new mothers using convenience sampling techniques. Nine interviews were completed using a virtual platform Zoom, and one via email correspondence. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis.

## Findings

Participants were first-time mothers ranging in age from 21 to 35 years, and all had partners. Two overarching themes emerged: 'The buck stops with me' and 'disrupted motherhood'. The pandemic impacted new

mothers' experiences and they experienced an overwhelming sense of responsibility for their baby. The challenge of meeting this responsibility was heightened in the context of societal expectations to do the 'right' thing and uncertainty and distrust around official guidance about COVID-19. The pandemic altered the expected transition into motherhood. Disruption to the birthing experience, an inability to connect with close friends and family and limited healthcare support were perceived to be detrimental. However, altered social expectations and the increased presence of partners were perceived positives.

## Commentary

This study<sup>5</sup> focused on first-time mothers' experiences of giving birth and postnatal supports available during COVID-19 lockdown. Globally, child, neonatal and maternal healthcare quality diminished during the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>2,5,6</sup> due to reduced access to relevant essential services such as family planning, antenatal care and adequately supervised community and facility-based deliveries.<sup>3,6</sup> As a result, morbidity and mortality is estimated to increase significantly for mothers, and their children aged under five years.<sup>3</sup> The use of lockdown and universal COVID-19 response changed inherent community socioeconomic dynamics by ignoring the social, political, economic and cultural factors, especially for socially vulnerable groups including mothers and their newborns.<sup>3</sup> To prevent mortality and morbidity a tailored approach in the development and implementation of policies and procedures should be based on need, rather than a one size fits all approach.<sup>3,5</sup>

Investing in resources and supports is vital to provide quality care for mothers and their newborns.<sup>2–4,6</sup> Learning from the global response to COVID-19, public health emergencies must generate good communication systems and build an understanding of local resources and innovations.<sup>3,6</sup>

Grey and Barnett's<sup>5</sup> study identifies disrupted expectations relating to formal and informal systems of support and present the impact of COVID-19 restrictions. However, the challenges experienced by first-time mothers who were lone parents or a minority ethnic family remain unknown.

**Competing interests** None declared.

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