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## **Perceptions and Experiences of Women with Birth-related Perineal Injuries regarding Postpartum Care : A review**

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## ABSTRACT

Birth-related perineal injuries are common among women who deliver vaginally, affecting up to 85% of women and including various degrees of tearing or surgical incisions (episiotomies). These injuries often result in physical pain, emotional distress, and challenges with postpartum recovery. This review explores women's perceptions and experiences regarding the postpartum care they receive for perineal injuries, focusing on physical recovery, pain management, emotional support, and informational needs. Understanding these perspectives can help healthcare providers develop more patient-centered postpartum care practices to support women's recovery and overall well-being.

Keywords: Birth-related perineal injuries, Postpartum Care.

## Introduction

Perineal injuries, including first- to fourth-degree tears and episiotomies, occur frequently during vaginal deliveries and can lead to lasting effects on a woman's physical, emotional, and social life. Postpartum care for perineal injuries typically includes pain management, wound care, and education on recovery practices. However, studies suggest that many women feel their needs in the postpartum period are unmet, particularly regarding pain management and psychological support. By exploring the lived experiences of women with perineal injuries, we can identify areas of postpartum care that may benefit from improvement to better support women's recovery and mental health (1).

### 1. Physical Recovery and Pain Management

Women with perineal injuries often report insufficient pain management during postpartum recovery. Many women experience persistent pain despite medical intervention, leading to discomfort in performing daily activities and caring for their newborns. Some women have reported that healthcare providers downplay their pain, attributing it to the normal recovery process after childbirth(2). This can result in feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction with postpartum care, highlighting the need for better pain management protocols that address the specific needs of women with perineal injuries.

Pain relief strategies, such as the use of cold packs, sitz baths, and topical anesthetics, have been found to offer relief for some women. However, there is often a lack of consistent guidance or access to these methods in many postpartum care settings. In a study women reported wanting more information

on non-pharmacological pain management options and clearer instructions on how to care for perineal injuries at home. Providing comprehensive pain management plans and educating women on self-care practices may improve their comfort and recovery (3,4).

### 2. Emotional and Psychological Support

The psychological impact of perineal injuries can be profound. Many women experience feelings of vulnerability, embarrassment, and distress as they cope with their injuries in the postpartum period. Priddis et al.2014 (5) found that women with severe perineal trauma, such as third- and fourth-degree tears, often feel isolated and may struggle with low self-esteem due to discomfort and concerns about their physical health. These emotional challenges can be further exacerbated by a lack of empathy from healthcare providers, who may focus primarily on the physical aspects of recovery.

Increased attention to the emotional needs of women with perineal injuries could help foster a more holistic approach to postpartum care. Counseling services or support groups for new mothers with perineal trauma can provide a safe space for them to share their experiences and receive reassurance. Emotional support from healthcare providers, through active listening and validation of the woman's feelings, has been shown to help reduce anxiety and improve satisfaction with postpartum care (6).

### 3. Informational Needs

Many women feel inadequately informed about what to expect in terms of recovery from perineal injuries, including how to manage pain, prevent complications, and resume daily activities. A study indicated that women with perineal trauma often lack access to clear, comprehensive information, leading to feelings of uncertainty and fear about their recovery process(6). Women in this study expressed a desire for specific guidance on hygiene practices, perineal exercises, and signs of complications, such as infection or prolonged bleeding.

Clear communication from healthcare providers regarding the expected duration and nature of the recovery process is essential. Written or digital resources provided at discharge could offer practical advice on wound care, mobility exercises, and other recovery strategies. Additionally, ensuring that women know whom to contact if they experience complications may alleviate some of their concerns and improve their confidence in managing their recovery (7).

#### 4. Follow-up Care

Regular follow-up appointments are essential for monitoring the healing process of perineal injuries and providing ongoing support. However, studies show that follow-up care is often insufficient, with many women reporting that they do not receive adequate assessments or guidance on managing long-term effects, such as pain during sexual intercourse or urinary incontinence. Andrews et al. suggest that healthcare systems should implement standardized follow-up procedures for women with severe perineal injuries to ensure that their recovery is progressing smoothly(7).

#### 5. Gaps in Postpartum Care for Perineal Injuries

Despite recommendations for comprehensive care for women with perineal trauma, there remain gaps in meeting their physical and emotional needs. Limited availability of specialized services, such as pelvic floor physiotherapy and mental health support, is a common issue in postpartum care. Healthcare providers may also lack training in how to address the unique challenges faced by women with perineal injuries. Integrated care involving multidisciplinary teams—including obstetricians, midwives, physiotherapists, and mental health professionals—can improve recovery outcomes for women with perineal trauma(8).

#### 6. Recommendations for Improving Postpartum Care

- **Enhanced Pain Management:** Tailoring pain management strategies to the severity of perineal injuries, including both pharmacological and non-pharmacological options, may improve women's comfort during recovery.
- **Holistic Support and Counseling:** Integrating emotional support and counseling into postpartum care can help address the psychological challenges associated with perineal trauma, providing women with a more supportive recovery environment (4)
- **Improved Information Delivery:** Providing detailed, clear information on self-care practices, hygiene, and warning signs of complications can empower women and reduce anxiety during the recovery process .
- **Consistent Follow-up Care:** Ensuring that women with perineal injuries receive consistent, personalized follow-up care can help them feel supported and offer timely interventions when complications arise(9)

#### Conclusion

Women with birth-related perineal injuries face significant physical and emotional challenges during the postpartum period. Addressing gaps in pain management, emotional support, informational resources, and follow-up care can improve their recovery experience and quality of life. Understanding women's perceptions and experiences can guide healthcare providers in delivering more patient-centered postpartum care, ultimately enhancing maternal well-being and satisfaction.

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