



# Silver linings: The mixed personal experiences among postpartum women during the COVID-19 pandemic

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## Introduction

- The adversities associated with COVID-19 pandemic have led to numerous psychosocial challenges, but it is possible that the pandemic brings about opportunities for personal growth.
- Data on personal growth as a result of the pandemic has been limited, although some work have documented such experiences among young adults<sup>1</sup>.
- The postpartum period is a unique period of time during which mothers may experience mixed emotions with respect to birth and their role as caregivers<sup>2,3</sup>.
- While there is an accumulating literature on the negative impacts of the pandemic on postpartum women<sup>4,5</sup>, there is relatively little that is known about any positive or personal growth experiences during this time.

## Project Aims

To describe features of positive or personal growth experiences among women who gave birth around the COVID-19 pandemic through a qualitative approach.

## Methods

**Sample** (N=64): Postpartum women with babies 5-11 months old who participated in Wave 2 (November 2020-July 2021) of the Perinatal Experiences and COVID-19 Effects (PEACE) Study.

**Procedures:** An online survey about the COVID-19 pandemic and postpartum experiences and well-being was administered. Procedures were approved by the Mass General Brigham IRB. Themes were derived from qualitative coding of participants' free responses to the prompt: "Are there experiences in the survey we missed that you wish to describe?"

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## Results

### Breastfeeding

"[Working from home] made it easier to breastfeed... and allowed me to breastfeed longer."



### Bonding

"My relationship with my baby has benefited."

"My husband got to work from home in the baby's first month."

### Personal Growth

"In many ways it has been a beautiful period for me personally, even as the world collapses."

"The [pandemic] allowed me to grow as a mom."

### Professional Growth

"[The pandemic] has greatly enriched the work I will get back to doing in a few months."  
(Primary Care Physician)

"The pandemic made me less afraid to try something new and gave me a push to get started."

## Conclusion

- 11% of our respondents reported features of personal growth.
- Themes of positive or personal growth include breastfeeding, bonding, personal growth, and professional growth.
- Although a small percentage, it appears that some recognize personal or positive growth during the pandemic.
- These findings show that women who recently gave birth may experience mixed emotions as a result of the pandemic beyond the emotions associated with postpartum experiences; acknowledging this may be useful in the provision of care for postpartum women.

Sample	Means or %
Maternal age (years)	34.3
Maternal race	
White	95.5%
Other	4.5%
Infant Age (weeks)	40.4
First Pregnancy	
Yes	42.4%
No	57.6%

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