



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 adults¹.
- 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^{2,3}.
- While there is an accumulating literature on the negative impacts of the pandemic on postpartum women^{4,5}, 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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