**Introduction**

• As many as 1 in 7 women in the United States experience symptoms associated with postpartum depression (PPD), such as insomnia, anxiety, fear, disininterest in social interactions, and loss of pleasure in previously enjoyed activities (American Psychological Association, 2008).

• Occupational therapists have the understanding and skills to address the challenges mothers with PPD may encounter in engaging in occupations (Barbic et al., 2021).

• The role of occupational therapists in supporting women with PPD in occupational engagement is understudied.

• To grasp the potential role of occupational therapists as a member of the perinatal team, there is a need to understand the experiences of mothers with PPD in their occupational engagements (Fernandes, 2018).

• This phenomenology study explored the lived experience of mothers with PPD, including what promoted or challenged their engagement in occupations.

**Methods**

• Mothers with PPD were recruited from New Leaf Counseling Services of the Tennessee Valley, LLC through convenience sampling.

• Potential participants received a study flyer via email or handwritten delivery.

• Participants were included in the study after meeting the following inclusion criteria: 1. Diagnosis of postpartum depression; 2. Individuals provide care to their infant; 3. English as their primary language; 4. Over the age of 18 years; and 5. In-person interview: access to transportation; Zoom interview: access to internet/technology.

• Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted in person or via Zoom and lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes.

• Following transcription, interviews were analyzed according to the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) methodology (Smith et al., 2022).

• The steps of the IPA method include: 1. Reading and re-reading; 2. Exploratory noting; 3. Constructing experiential statements; 4. Searching for connections across experiential statements; 5. Naming the personal experiential statements (PETS) and consolidating and organizing them into a table; 6. Continuing the individual analysis of other cases; and 7. Working with personal experiential themes to develop group experiential themes across cases (Smith et. al., 2022).

**Results**

• All participants (N = 8) were Caucasian, born in North America, married, reported experiencing symptoms of PPD, and had received a diagnosis of PPD.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1: Fear Concerning Outcome of Baby</td>
<td>1a. Fear of Not Meeting Baby's Needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme 2: Expectation versus Reality</td>
<td>1b. Fear of Unintentional Harm to Baby</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theme 3: Values, Fulfillment, and Empowerment Maintained or Restored by Engaging in Occupations</td>
<td>2a. Expectations Originating from Self</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2b. Expectations Originating from Others</td>
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**Discussion**

**Discussion of Main Findings:**

• Three primary themes emerged; however, participants experienced vast factors that promoted and challenged occupational engagement.

• These findings are consistent with the scoping review by Barbic and colleagues (2021) in the role of occupational therapy in the treatment of women with PPD by supporting occupational distribution and transitions and managing the experience of motherhood.

• The findings of this study highlight the importance of maintaining values, fulfillment, and empowerment while engaging in occupations during the transition to motherhood.

**Limitations:**

• Participants shared similar demographical information. Thus, results cannot be generalized to the entire population of women experiencing PPD.

• Perinatal depression and PPD are ambiguous diagnoses in terms of onset and symptoms in clinical and literature interpretations.

• Participants self-reported receiving a diagnosis of PPD. No official documentation was collected from the participants’ doctor/counselor.

**Conclusion**

• These findings help perinatal practitioners understand the role of occupational therapy in promoting mental health and well-being in mothers with PPD.

• This study highlights the need for additional research in client-centered evaluation and evidence-based occupational interventions for this specific population.

**References**


**Acknowledgement & Contact information**

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