

ABSTRACT:

Introduction:

The postpartum period is a very important period for the health of the mother and the newborn. Despite its importance, research on this period is limited and tends to be more focused on biomedical aspects of the postpartum period. In the occupied Palestinian territory, little is known on how women experience the postpartum period and what women consider important during this period. This study assesses Palestinian women's postpartum quality of life by using a previously validated instrument, the MAPP-QOL instrument. It further explores Palestinian women's experiences and the dynamics of support available to women within a broad quality of life framework, seeking to identify important determinants of life quality during this period.

Methods:

The study utilizes both quantitative and qualitative methods. Focus group discussions were used to validate and adapt the instrument in the local context, and add possible determinants identified by women themselves. A cross sectional survey utilizing the adapted MAPP-QOL was then completed in the occupied Palestinian territory. The sample was drawn from the 2006 PAPFAM sample frame; all women reporting pregnant during the time of the PAPFAM survey were included in this study with a final sample size of 1020 women.

Results:

The qualitative findings indicate that the postpartum period is characterized by exhaustion, new pressures, emotional changes, and an 'open body.' For women, exhaustion and multitasking were the main sources of stress and accounted for the emotional changes that they were going through. The findings also indicate that female relatives still play a significant role as support providers in the postpartum period, although many women indicated a desire for greater involvement from their husbands during this period.

In terms of quality of life, the mean overall quality of life score for the sample was 21.53 (out of a maximum score of 30), with domain means ranging from 19.74 to 23.12; indicating an average slight satisfaction during the postpartum period. Main variations in quality of life scores were associated with regional district, refugee status, the loss of a relative due to occupation, standard of living, wanted-ness of pregnancy, and dissatisfaction scores on scales measuring various forms of support received by these women, and constructed based on the analysis of the findings of the focus group discussions. The scale scores accounted for a major part of the total R^2 when entered into the regression analysis, resulting in a change in the R^2 from 0.126 (without the addition of the scales) to 0.502 (when the scales were added).

Conclusion:

The importance of pregnancy wanted-ness in determining postpartum quality of life highlights the need for further research into unwanted pregnancies and family planning programs in the oPt. Also, in light of the sharp rise in R^2 after the addition of the scales into the regression analysis, it may be worthwhile to consider adding the scales as standard measures linked to postpartum quality of life.