

Understanding the Intersection of Postpartum Depression & Grief Following Infant Loss

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Introduction

- Stillbirth can be defined as when an infant dies after 28 weeks of pregnancy, but before or during birth (World Health Organization, n.d.)
- Overlap of grief & PPD symptoms
- Postpartum depression (PPD) is a common psychological condition developed by women post-birth
- Culturally responsive practices
- Trauma-informed care
- Includes addressing contemporary and historical trauma
- Combining frameworks is necessary for effective, evidence-based care of bereaved mothers
- Model: **Figure No. 1**

Intersecting Frameworks

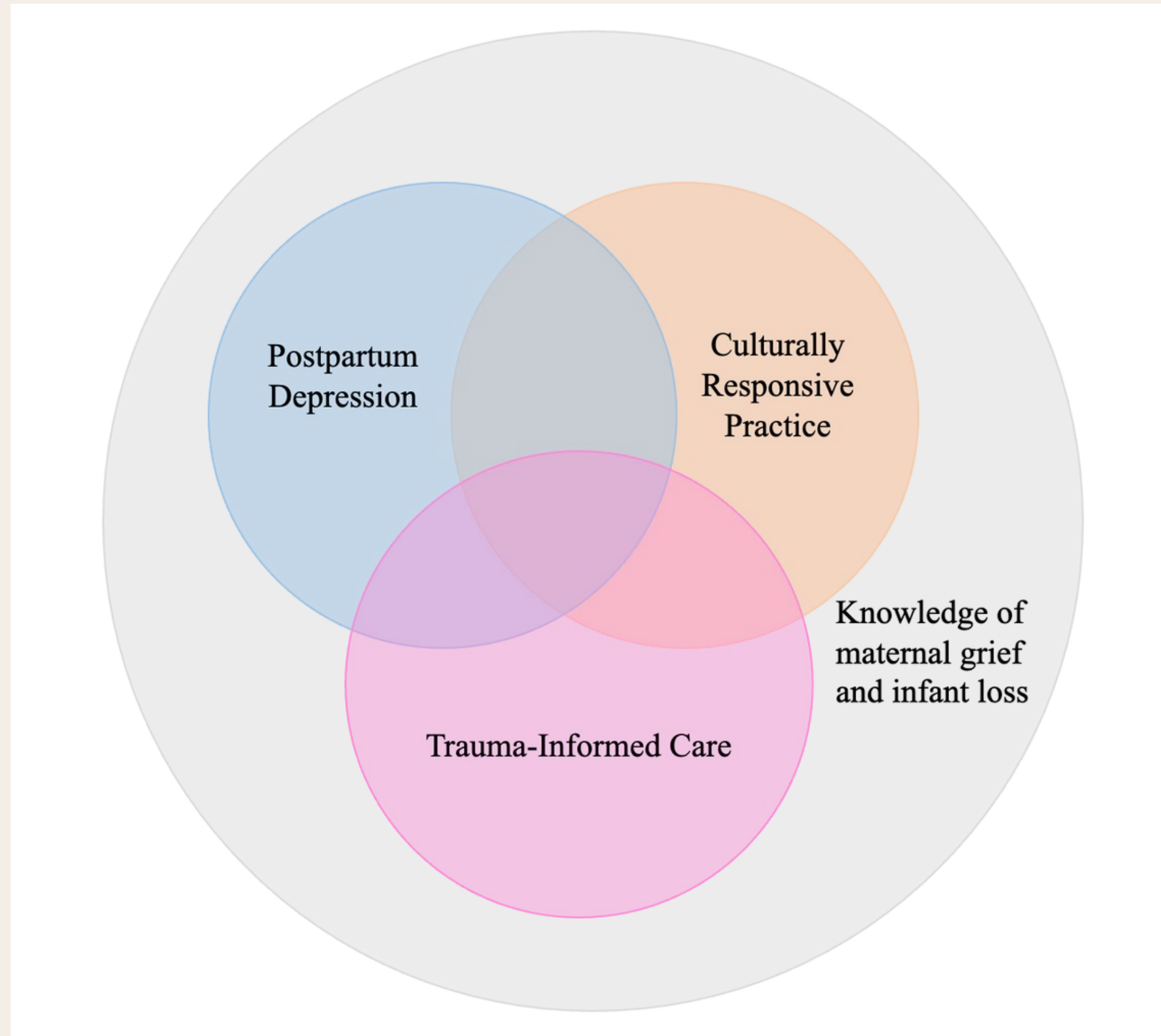


Figure No. 1

Methodology:

- A literature review was conducted.
 - Utilized four databases: BMC, NCBI, and PubMed, and ScienceDirect.
 - Utilized additional literature from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, World Health Organization, American Psychological Association, Cleveland Clinic, Massachusetts General Hospital, Public Library of Science, The Lancet, and British Journal of Midwifery.
- **Key Terms:** neonatal death, stillbirth, grief, postpartum depression, grief, perinatal bereavement, bereavement care, cultural responsiveness, trauma-informed care, stigma.
- **Limiting Terms:** All research was based on publications made in the past thirteen years (2012-2025), with no translations.

Infant Loss

- Stillbirth affects about 1 in 175 births, with approximately 21,000 occurring in the United States each year (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2024)
- Parents often experience negative psychological and physical symptoms
- Sudden & unexpected losses ~~ex~~ inability to anticipate grief and change in the situation
- Effects of public and self-stigma
 - Lack of opportunities to publicly grieve
 - Self-stigma can cause feelings of shame, self-blame, and guilt

Grief

- Grief is the distress experienced by individuals after a significant loss, typically the death of a beloved person (American Psychological Association, n.d.)
 - Physical and psychological symptoms
- Grief levels evolve over time
- Prolonged grief disorder related to like isolation, lack of social support, and stigma (Atkins et al., 2023)
 - Stable, high-level grief trajectories → distress and functional impairment

Postpartum Depression

- Postpartum depression is a mental health condition developed by about 6.5% to 20% of women typically within 4 weeks after childbirth (Mughalet al., 2022)
- Different from the “baby blues”
 - Pervasive symptoms → distress & functional impairment
- PPD and grief/prolonged grief often occur comorbidly
- Psychosocial, psychological, and pharmacological interventions are treatment options

Bereavement Care

- Increased risk for multiple adverse outcomes
- The RESPECT study (2020)
 - Eight principles of bereavement care:
 1. Reduce stigma
 2. Respectful care
 3. Collaboration
 4. Identifying causes of stillbirth
 5. Normalizing grief responses
 6. Holistic care
 7. Information on future reproductive health
 8. Training of healthcare professionals
- Choices should be provided and acknowledged, respected, and supported
- Recognize bereaved women as mothers
- Consider impacts of social and self-stigma on access to care

Cultural Responsiveness

- Clinicians recognize how their own cultural identity and biases inform their perspectives
- Acknowledge and respect the client's cultural and religious identity
 - Impact on coping
- Collaborate with the client to integrate their unique identity into bereavement care
 - Beliefs, values, and customs
 - Social support

Trauma-Informed Care

- Guide the client in understanding their significant loss and its effect on their life
 - Understand the experience
 - Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Prepare clients for future pregnancies
- Recognize effect of trauma symptoms
- Shifting the focus of care
- Base treatment on five principles: safety, choice, collaboration, trustworthiness, and empowerment

Discussion

- Infant loss is a complex experience
 - PPD and grief symptoms
 - Stigma
 - PTSD
- Significant impact on a family's future
- Bereavement care includes acknowledging a bereaved mother's identity as a parent, honoring an infant's existence, respecting parents' grief practices, and reducing the stigma around the loss
- Trauma-informed care recognizes the client's unique experience and trauma as well as its impact

Future Implications

- Involvement of various health and human services professionals
 - Interdisciplinary collaboration promotes high-quality, comprehensive care
- Nurses
 - Respond to the biopsychosocial effects of infant loss
 - Refer to social workers or counselors
 - Can be trained on how to implement consistent bereavement services
 - Grief counseling practices
 - Providing family education
 - Creating memories/mementos
- Social Workers
 - Provide direct counseling
 - Refer patients to outside counselors to continue services
 - Connect patients with community resources and additional hospital support staff



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