

# Postpartum depression and mental health literacy: A call for action in post-pandemic Malaysia

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Postpartum depression (PPD) significantly impacts maternal and infant well-being, especially with limited support. NHMS 2022 reported 11.2% of mothers had PPD symptoms. Low mental health literacy (MHL) in Malaysia contributes to delayed help-seeking, and data on maternal MHL is scarce. This study aims to establish baseline maternal MHL and PPD incidence in a Malaysian tertiary centre. **Materials and Methods:** Mothers in their third trimester attending the outpatient O&G clinic Hospital Shah Alam were surveyed from April to July 2024 using the EPDS for PPD and the PoDLIS for postpartum MHL. An EPDS score of 12 or more indicated PPD, while a Likert scale score of 4 to 5 reflected higher MHL. **Results:** Of the 215 mothers approached, 211 completed the questionnaire. The participants' mean age was 31.24 (SD=4.68), with most identifying as Malay (n=160, 74.4%) and having more than one child (55.9%). A small percentage (n=10, 4.8%) reported a history of mental health disorders, while 45% (n=95) had an EPDS score of 12 or higher. The overall mean MHL score was 3.25 (SD=0.55), with those having PPD scoring higher ( $3.39 \pm 0.32$ ) than those without PPD ( $3.13 \pm 0.66$ ),  $t(173.9) = -3.65$ ,  $p=0.01$ . **Conclusion:** Incidence of PPD in this study was alarmingly higher than the 14.29% reported by Hairol(2021), which could be attributed to our participants being in their third trimester rather than 6 months postpartum, and the post-pandemic context. Recent meta-analyses have revealed a global PPD incidence of around 20%. The mean MHL score was relatively low, highlighting urgent need to improve MHL among mothers. Interestingly, participants with PPD demonstrated higher MHL, likely due to their proactive efforts to understand their condition and targeted education from healthcare providers. This study revealed a high incidence of PPD, underscoring the need for nationwide screening and intervention, particularly post-pandemic. Enhancing MHL is essential for early detection and support nationally targeting both mothers and healthcare providers.