

**Support network in the postpartum period: an integrative review***Red de apoyo en el posparto: una revisión integradora**Rede de apoio no puerpério: uma revisão integrativa***Cristina Souza Alves¹**

ORCID: 0009-0009-2640-1658

Stfeanie Goulart da Silva Cardozo¹

ORCID: 0000-0003-4994-8049

Abilene do Nascimento Gouvea^{1,2*}

ORCID: 0000-0002-3033-5069

Renata Souza Alves Maia¹

ORCID: 0009-0006-3603-0211

Claudia Dames de Arruda Lavelle²

ORCID: 0009-0007-7219-574X

Ana Lúcia Freire Lopes²

ORCID: 0000-0001-7012-9908

Helena Moreira de Araujo¹

ORCID: 0009-0006-6496-2710

Rachel de Gouvêa Ribeiro¹

ORCID: 0009-0009-9838-1895

Julia de Gouvea Ribeiro¹

ORCID: 0009-0009-2083-863X

Raiane da Silva Rachid¹

ORCID: 0000-0002-7256-5241

¹Universidade Veiga de Almeida. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.²Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.***Corresponding author:** E-mail: abilenegouvea@gmail.com**Abstract**

The aim was to highlight the main support system for women's health care and monitoring during the postpartum period. This integrative literature review was conducted in March 2023, based on articles related to the study topic from the last five years, retrieved from an online database. This study, based on the selected articles, resulted in the conceptualization of a social support network as a system comprised of different individuals belonging to the social sphere who provide support in different areas—emotional, material, educational, and others. Therefore, it can be concluded that when the postpartum woman, her family, friends, and healthcare professionals integrate and face the reality of the postpartum period with transparency and commitment, the development of the process becomes easier and healthier. Therefore, it is extremely important to train professionals on this topic from the undergraduate level and to encourage research and studies focused on the main support network during the postpartum period.

Descriptors: Puerperium; Postpartum; Puerperal; Social Support; Mother and Child Health.**How to cite this article:**

Alves CS, Cardozo SGS, Gouvea AN, Maia RSA, Lavelle CDA, Lopes ALF, Araujo HM, Ribeiro RG, Ribeiro JG, Rachid RS. Support network in the postpartum period: an integrative review. Glob Clin Res. 2025;5(1):e51. <https://doi.org/10.5935/2763-8847.20210051>

Submission: 06-23-2023**Approval:** 09-05-2024

Resumén

El objetivo fue destacar el principal sistema de apoyo para el cuidado y seguimiento de la salud de las mujeres durante el período posparto. Esta revisión bibliográfica integradora se realizó en marzo de 2023, con base en artículos relacionados con el tema de estudio de los últimos cinco años, recuperados de una base de datos en línea. Este estudio, basado en los artículos seleccionados, resultó en la conceptualización de una red de apoyo social como un sistema compuesto por diferentes individuos pertenecientes al ámbito social que brindan apoyo en diferentes áreas: emocional, material, educativo y otras. Por lo tanto, se puede concluir que cuando la mujer posparto, su familia, amigos y el profesional de la salud se integran y afrontan la realidad del período posparto con transparencia y compromiso, el desarrollo del proceso se vuelve más fácil y saludable. Por lo tanto, es de suma importancia capacitar a los profesionales en este tema desde el nivel de pregrado y fomentar la investigación y los estudios centrados en la principal red de apoyo durante el período posparto.

Descriptores: Puerperio; Postparto; Puerperal; Apoyo Social; Salud Materno-Infantil.

Resumo

Objetivou-se evidenciar o principal apoio na assistência e acompanhamento de saúde à mulher no período puerperal. Pesquisa de revisão integrativa de literatura, realizada no período de março de 2023, baseada em artigos referentes ao assunto do estudo, nos últimos cinco anos, buscados em base de sistema online. No presente estudo, através dos artigos selecionados, resultou em que a conceituação de rede de apoio social, como um sistema constituído por diferentes indivíduos pertencentes à esfera social, que fornecem apoio, em diferentes âmbitos, ou seja, emocional, material, educacional, entre outros. Conclui-se, portanto, quando a puérpera, família, amigos, profissional de saúde integram e enfrentam a realidade do período puerperal com transparência, empenho, o desenvolvimento do processo se torna mais fácil e mais saudável. Sendo assim, é de extrema importância a capacitação desde a graduação dos profissionais sobre essa temática e incentivo à pesquisa e estudos voltados à principal rede de apoio no período puerperal.

Descritores: Puerpério; Pós-Parto; Puerperal; Apoio Social; Saúde Materno-Infantil.

Introduction

The postpartum period is the post-pregnancy period that involves several changes in a woman's body, and recovery times can vary depending on the individual. In addition to physiological changes, emotional and social changes occur that involve the woman and her family, requiring attention from health services and the environment in which she lives. It is a period of intense biopsychosocial changes that requires diverse care and is influenced by the different people who share this moment with the postpartum woman and the newborn. During this period, women become vulnerable, as they realize that their lives, after the birth of a baby, are subject to both personal and social restrictions. Women often experience mixed feelings: happiness at the arrival of the long-awaited baby, satisfaction at having fulfilled a life goal, joy, and negativity due to the losses apparently incurred with motherhood. For this reason, women in the postpartum period tend to utilize practices and forms of self-care passed down from generation to generation through beliefs, customs, and taboos. However, the focus is on caring for the baby in all the postpartum woman's actions, who begins to prioritize everything related to the child, underestimating her own self-care^{1,2}.

However, in healthcare practice, care actions are predominantly directed at potential complications related to the postpartum period, focusing on physiological and pathological aspects. This often ignores how women feel

during the postpartum period and the factors that influence their adaptation and integration into the roles they assume after becoming mothers. Therefore, this study aims to identify the primary support network for postpartum women².

Based on this premise, the study's guiding question is: "What is the main support network for women during the postpartum period?" This support exists in different ways within the postpartum woman's social context. Therefore, the general objective of this study was to identify the key support network throughout the postpartum period. Based on this principle, the specific objective is to describe the complications related to the postpartum period and the factors that influence women's adaptation and integration into the roles they assume after becoming mothers.

The study's purpose lies in providing information about support networks, highlighting their influence on women during the postpartum period. It aims to demonstrate social relationships and how they fit into this context, intending to promote knowledge and clarification on the topic. The relevance of the topic lies in providing nursing professionals with knowledge on the topic to present actions that help minimize the feelings of anguish and anxiety experienced during this phase of a woman's life, encompassing biological, physical, and emotional aspects. Thus, it contributes to the development of more studies related to the topic.



Methodology

This is an integrative literature review. A literature review aggregates knowledge on a given topic to complete a study that is significant for nursing. It is an essential task for researchers. Bibliographic research is considered one of the best ways to begin literary study, as it seeks analogies and discrepancies within the research bases found. The evolution of electronic media for researchers has democratized access and provided frequent information updates³.

The research followed methodological standards, respecting the steps that constitute an integrative literature review: identification of the theme and selection of the research question, establishment of inclusion and exclusion criteria/literature search, identification of pre-selected and selected studies, categorization of selected studies, analysis and interpretation of results, and synthesis of knowledge on the theme and presentation of the review⁴.

The guiding question establishes the fundamental phase of the study, defining which studies will be included and the methods used for data collection. It must be formulated objectively, linked to theoretical knowledge, and contribute to the researcher's knowledge base⁴. Therefore, to guide the study and find better evidence, we applied the PICo strategy (P=Population, I=Interest, and Co=Context), in which we constructed a research question to base our studies, as shown in Chart 1.

Chart 1. Description of the PICo strategy. Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil, 2023

Acronym	Definition	Application
P	Population/Patient/Problem	Postpartum women
I	Main Interest	Main support network during the postpartum period
Co	Context	Postpartum period

The PICo strategy requires a connection between description and analysis. Therefore, it is possible to identify the direction that guided the study, as well as the individuals covered by this topic, their assertions, and the contribution it offers to the scientific field.

A search for journals within the proposed theme was initiated in electronic databases.

The research was conducted from March to June and used the Online Search System, Latin American and Caribbean Literature in Health Sciences (LILACS), and the Database in Nursing (BDENf), Medical Literature (MEDLINE) databases through the Virtual Health Library (VHL) portal. The search was conducted for content that could provide scientific productions that answered the guiding question of the review study.

The search for studies was carried out using the following descriptors: puerperium, postpartum, puerperal, and social support. Based on our guiding question, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. Inclusion criteria: research articles addressing the topic, found on online platforms, and original in the health field, articles in Brazilian Portuguese, with a time frame from 2012 to June 2022. Exclusion criteria were established: articles without a scientific basis, outside the addressed topic, duplicate articles, theses, dissertations, and conference abstracts.

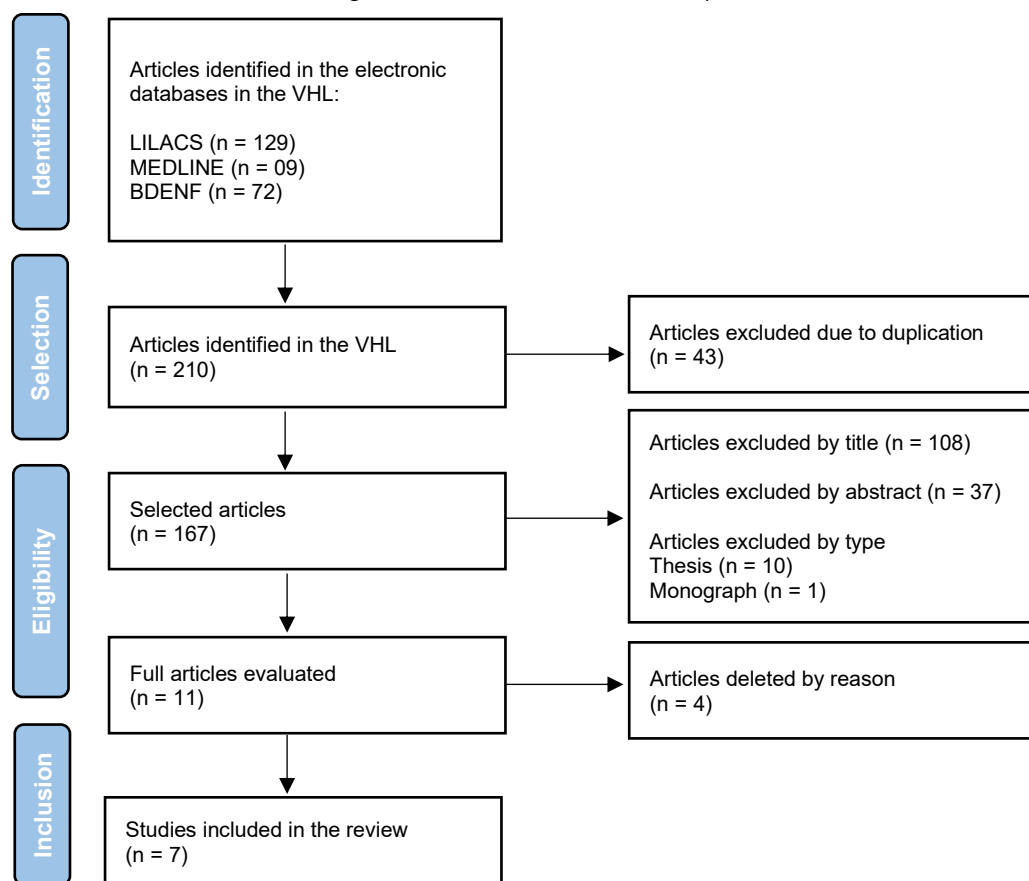
After designating the descriptors used for the study, the Boolean operator AND was applied to perform cross-referencing between the descriptors: "Puerperium AND Postpartum, Puerperal AND Social Support, Puerperium AND Social Support, Puerperium AND Social Support AND Postpartum." As organized in Chart 2.

The method of searching for articles in electronic databases was through the application of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) model, which consists of four stages and aims to help authors improve the presentation of systematic reviews and meta-analyses, and as a criterion for evaluating published studies⁵.

Chart 2. Article tracking. Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil, 2023

Descriptors	Database	No. of articles found
"Social Support AND Postpartum"	LILACS	51
	BDENF	28
	MEDLINE	02
"Puerperium AND Social Support"	LILACS	28
	BDENF	14
	MEDLINE	01
"Puerperal AND Social Support"	LILACS	31
	BDENF	20
	MEDLINE	05
"Puerperium AND Social Support AND Postpartum"	LILACS	19
	BDENF	10
	MEDLINE	01

Figure 1. Flowchart of the article selection process. Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil, 2023



Results and Discussion

While reading the studies covered, the topics became more subjective, meaning few publications directly addressed the subject, focusing on which support network is most important during the postpartum period. Most studies address the risks of postpartum depression related to the mother-baby relationship. Therefore, it was necessary to increase the time frame to ten years.

The study presents a total of 210 articles compatible with the proposed theme, as illustrated by the PRISMA flowchart in Figure 1, which summarizes the search and exclusion process during the selection phase. Forty-three articles were excluded due to duplication, 108 due to title

selection, 37 due to abstract selection, and 11 due to type (monograph $n=1$ and thesis $n=10$). Eleven studies were selected for full-text analysis, of which four were excluded because they did not meet the study proposal. Thus, seven articles were included in the integrative review. The descriptor "social support" is present in most of the selected studies and presented the largest number of publications when cross-referenced with the other descriptors. However, all articles have the same target audience: postpartum women. Based on the selection of the seven articles, the main results presented by each of the articles that comprise this integrative review are organized in Chart 3.

Chart 3. Characterization of the articles studied. Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil, 2023

Title/ Authors/ Year	Objective/ Methodology	Results
Apoio social na perspectiva da puérpera adolescente Cremonese, et al. 2017	Understand how social support from various social networks is provided to adolescent postpartum women. A qualitative and descriptive field study to be conducted with adolescents experiencing postpartum and who have a connection with the health care facility.	This discussion will contribute to the development of knowledge about nursing care for adolescent postpartum women. The aim is also for the knowledge generated by this study to strengthen nurses' performance in postpartum care practices and assist in the qualification and consolidation of nurses' work in this area of care, thereby enabling a reduction in maternal and infant mortality rates.
Rede de apoio social de puérperas na prática da amamentação Prates, et al. 2015	Understand the social support network of postpartum women in breastfeeding. This is a qualitative, descriptive study, using participatory research principles, conducted through interviews with 21 postpartum women.	The family environment was the most important factor among the interviewees, represented primarily by the mothers of the postpartum women and other women in the family. Breastfeeding appears to be permeated by myths, beliefs, and values passed down from generation to generation, and is strongly influenced by the postpartum woman's social support network.

Aspectos socioeconômicos e conhecimento de puérperas sobre o aleitamento materno Boff, et al. 2015	Determine the association between maternal and socioeconomic factors and mothers' knowledge about breastfeeding. This study involved 71 postpartum women in hospital beds. Data were collected through questionnaires: one on socioeconomic factors and another on knowledge about breastfeeding.	Of the interviewees, one did not attend prenatal appointments, and 48 received some information about breastfeeding. All mothers knew that breastfed children develop fewer diseases; 44 knew that children do not require water or other supplements until the sixth month of life. Regarding socioeconomic and knowledge issues, there was a significant positive association between the two; that is, postpartum women with higher family income had a higher percentage of correct answers.
Sentimentos vivenciados por puérperas durante o pós-parto Santos, et al. 2015	Understand the feelings experienced by postpartum women. This is an exploratory and descriptive study with a qualitative approach, with 15 women in the municipality of Lajes, Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, organized using Content Analysis, and analyzed using Symbolic Interactionism. The information was reread to organize it into categories.	When experiencing the postpartum period, the interviewees perceived this new phase as a time of transformation, in which feelings alternate that, analyzed by interactionist principles, can be considered positive or negative.
Sou mãe: e agora? Vivências do puerpério Campos & Azevedo 2021	Investigate how women experience postpartum today. Qualitative research interviewed ten middle-class women from Rio de Janeiro, working professionals, aged 29 to 37, married (legally or not), heterosexual, first-time mothers, and with children between 8 months and 2 years old.	The results indicated that the postpartum period is an idealized period for women, but one that is often lived with suffering and emotional instability. We confirmed the importance of a support network for both mothers and babies.
Maternidade e trabalho: associação entre depressão pós-parto, apoio social e satisfação conjugal Manenti & Rodrigues 2016	Investigated aspects related to rights, marital status, social support, and the prevalence of postpartum depression among working mothers, as well as their relationship with the variables studied. The study involved 30 first-time mothers with babies between two and six months old. The instruments used were the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale and an interview protocol.	Maternal depression is present in rates found in the Brazilian population and indicates that Brazilian mothers should be cared for, considering the associations observed in aspects identified since pregnancy, such as the presence of mental disorders. We emphasize that the study, due to the limited number of participants and the convenience of the sample, prevents generalization of the data presented.
A percepção da puérpera sobre os cuidados recebidos pela sua rede de apoio Shwantes, et al. 2021	Identify women's perceptions of the care they receive from their support network during the postpartum period. Exploratory research with a quantitative approach was conducted at a Basic Health Unit in the municipality of São José. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the final sample consisted of 16 postpartum women. Data were collected in October 2020 through a structured Google Forms questionnaire sent via email and analyzed using simple descriptive statistics.	It made it possible to identify women's perceptions of the care received by their support network during the postpartum period, as well as the identification of this support network and the main care received during the postpartum period.

Based on the articles selected for the papers. Pregnancy is considered a critical, biologically determined period of transition, capable of producing a temporary state of emotional instability due to changes in social role and identity, in addition to the interpersonal and intrapsychic adaptations that the woman must make. This period extends into the postpartum period, which also involves physiological changes, as well as changes in routine and family relationships. Therefore, during the postpartum period, the mother experiences the process of motherhood, which involves the mother being able to not only provide assistance with the baby's basic needs, such as nutrition and hygiene, but also, through proximity, transmit information about the external and internal worlds^{6,7}.

Consequently, this is a neglected period of maternal care, with most attention focused on the baby, disregarding the psychological transformations that permeate the pregnancy-postpartum period. Culturally, there seems to be an expectation that women readily assume motherhood, without major difficulties, and perform their role well. The family goes through a process of adaptation with the arrival

of the new member and with other children, if any. Furthermore, household chores must continue, and in most cases, these are the woman's responsibility. It is in this situation that the postpartum woman may face various difficulties and limitations, depending not only on factors related to her and her engagement in the postpartum period^{8,9}.

Thus, from birth, individuals forge connections, with one of the first connections established occurring between family members. In this context, the family is perceived as a system of continuous, interconnected relationships, established by kinship ties and a social support network for its very survival. Therefore, the family represents the primary socializing agent that provides care. Therefore, in this system of connections, the health of individuals is closely linked to the beliefs, values, traditions, and relationships within the social support network. From this perspective, the family has become an object of research, work, and care in nursing. However, beyond the family system, other actors also play a fundamental role in the success of the new mother, including healthcare

professionals, who also comprise the postpartum woman's social support network¹⁰.

The professionalization of individuals to support and instruct nursing mothers throughout the process occurs through prenatal and postnatal monitoring, a strategy that positively influences the prolongation of breastfeeding, for example. Therefore, it requires instruction and a complex set of interactional conditions within the social sphere of mother and baby; that is, the family is the influencer of this act. Therefore, it is worth noting that, in this study, we chose to conceptualize the social support network as a system comprised of different individuals within the social sphere who provide support in different areas - emotional, material, educational, among others^{9,10}.

Therefore, given this possibility, postpartum care should be perceived by healthcare professionals not only as an action focused on the newborn's well-being, but also as a process that expands and reflects other interactions and needs of women as mothers, wives, and women. Therefore, it is essential that, after the birth of a child, women receive emotional, physical, and informational support to enable a healthy postpartum period, bringing multiple and extensive benefits to the child and the family as a whole¹¹.

Conclusion

This study highlights the importance of a support network during the postpartum period. Since women undergo physiological and psychological changes during pregnancy, and when they reach the postpartum period, in addition to dealing with their own changes, they need to provide the necessary care for the baby in the first days of life, it is a difficult time for women; it is a time of adaptation, doubts, fears, and questions. Consequently, social support for postpartum women is crucial, as it is the foundation for safer and more informed decision-making. Based on the articles selected for this study, it was highlighted that the family is defined as the primary support network during the postpartum period. It is the social group in which the individual is formed, and which continues to influence them most directly throughout their lives. Therefore, when the postpartum woman, family, friends, and healthcare professionals integrate and face the reality of the postpartum period with transparency and commitment, the development of the process becomes easier and healthier. Therefore, it is extremely important to train professionals on this topic from the time they graduate and to encourage research and studies focused on the main support network during the postpartum period.

References

- Schawantes NOG, Rogério RS, Lourenço LFL, Souza WGA, Valcarengi RV. A percepção da puérpera sobre os cuidados recebidos pela sua rede de apoio. *Glob Clin Res* [Internet]. 2021 [acesso em 6 abr 2022]; Disponível em: <https://globalclinicalresearchj.com/index.php/globclinres/article/view/10>
- Riberio JP, et al. Necessidades sentidas pelas mulheres no período puerperal. *Rev Enferm* [Internet]. 2019 [acesso em 13 maio 2022];13. Disponível em: <https://pesquisa.bvsalud.org/porta/resource/pt/biblio-1006029>
- Souza MT, Silva MD, Carvalho R. Revisão integrativa: o que é e como fazer [Internet]. 2010 [acesso em 17 maio 2022]. Disponível em: <https://www.scielo.br/j/eins/a/ZQTBkVJZqcWrTT34cXLjtBx/?format=pdf&lang=pt>
- Mendes KDS, Silveira RCCP, Galvão CM. Revisão integrativa: método de pesquisa para a incorporação de evidências na saúde e na enfermagem [Internet]. 2008 [acesso em 24 maio 2022]. Disponível em: <https://www.scielo.br/j/tce/a/XzFkq6tjWs4wHNqNjKJLkXQ>
- Galvão TF, Pansani TSA, Harrad D. Principais itens para relatar Revisões sistemáticas e Meta-análises: A recomendação PRISMA. *Epidemiol Serv Saude* [Internet]. 2015 [acesso em 28 maio 2022];24. Disponível em: https://www.scielo.org/article/ssm/content/raw/?resource_ssm_path=/media/assets/ress/v24n2/2237-9622-ress-24-02-00335.pdf
- Campos PA, Carneiro TF. Sou mãe: e agora? Vivências do puerpério [Internet]. 2021 [acesso em 22 maio 2022]. Disponível em: <https://www.scielo.br/j/pusp/a/gRDZZ9sPmPNXKBBJnRtrxkQ/?format=pdf&lang=pt>
- Cremonese L, Timm MS, Oliveira G, et al. Apoio social na perspectiva da puérpera adolescente. *Rev Enferm UFPE* [Internet]. 2017 [acesso em 1 jun 2022];11. Disponível em: <https://pesquisa.bvsalud.org/porta/resource/pt/biblio-1032557>
- Manente MV, Rodrigues OMP. Maternidade e Trabalho: Associação entre Depressão Pós-parto, Apoio Social e Satisfação Conjugal [Internet]. 2016 [acesso em 19 maio 2022]. Disponível em: <https://pesquisa.bvsalud.org/porta/resource/pt/lil-797827>
- Prates LA, Schmalfluss JM, Lipinski JM. Rede de apoio social de puérperas na prática da amamentação. *Esc Anna Nery Rev Enferm* [Internet]. 2015 [acesso em 5 jun 2022];19. Disponível em: <https://pesquisa.bvsalud.org/porta/resource/pt/lil750735>
- Boff ADG, Paniagua LM, Scherer S, Goulart BNG. Aspectos socioeconômicos e conhecimento de puérperas sobre o aleitamento materno [Internet]. 2015 [acesso em 3 jun 2022]. Disponível em: <https://www.scielo.br/j/acr/a/B3wYbwH8fv3gzRPr5hRcsVd/?lang=pt>
- Santos FAP, Mazzo MHSN, Brito RS. *Rev Enferm UFPE* [Internet]. 2015 [acesso em 29 maio 2022];9. Disponível em: <https://pesquisa.bvsalud.org/porta/resource/pt/biblio-1022883>

