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Impact of husband support on maternal psychological well-being during pregnancy: a systematic review

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Pregnancy is a vulnerable phase for the mother's mental health. Adequate husband support is believed to reduce the risk of psychological disorders such as depression, anxiety, and stress. This study aims to systematically examine the influence of husband support on the psychological well-being of mothers during pregnancy.

Research Methodology: This systematic study was conducted by searching scientific articles in the PubMed, Scopus, and PsycINFO databases from 2020 to 2025. The inclusion criteria included quantitative studies that evaluated the relationship between husband support and the psychological condition of pregnant women. Data from 18 eligible studies were analyzed narratively.

Results: Most studies show that emotional, informative, and practical support from husbands is negatively correlated with maternal levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. Husbands who are actively involved in prenatal care contribute to the improvement of the mother's mental health. The lack of husband support has been shown to worsen psychological conditions during pregnancy.

Conclusion: Husband's support has a significant impact on maintaining the psychological well-being of pregnant women. Family-based interventions and couples education programs can be effective strategies to improve husband support and maternal mental health during pregnancy.

Keywords: Husband support, Maternal mental health, Pregnancy.

INTRODUCTION

Pregnancy is a transformative period in a woman's life, marked by physiological changes and profound emotional and psychological shifts. While it is often portrayed as a time of joy and anticipation, pregnancy can also introduce a wide range of stressors that place women at increased risk for psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, and mood instability. These mental health challenges are influenced by multiple biopsychosocial factors, with social support, particularly from a husband or intimate partner, emerging as one of the most significant protective elements identified in maternal mental health research (Wisner et al., 2024). Over the past decade, growing global attention has been directed toward understanding the social determinants of maternal health. Husband support, as a primary source of social interaction for many pregnant women, plays a central role in moderating their emotional experiences (Mamoh et al., 2023). Numerous studies have linked spousal support with lower levels of prenatal depression and anxiety, better coping mechanisms, and improved maternal-fetal bonding. The World Health Organization (2023) recognizes partner involvement as a strategic intervention point for improving outcomes for both mothers and infants (Wahyuni et al., 2024).

The construct of husband support is multifaceted, encompassing emotional reassurance, informational guidance, practical help, and the partner's presence during significant phases of pregnancy and childbirth (Hoq et al., 2025). Emotional support through empathy, active listening, and expressions of love can significantly buffer the psychological upheavals many women experience. Informational support may include explaining medical advice or researching prenatal care resources. Instrumental support can range from attending medical appointments to sharing household responsibilities (Tri Wijayanti et al., 2025). Each form of support contributes uniquely to shaping the pregnant woman's psychological landscape. Despite growing recognition of its importance, husband support remains underemphasized in many maternal health programs, particularly in low- and middle-income countries where patriarchal norms continue to dominate healthcare dynamics. In these contexts, pregnancy is often viewed as the sole domain of women, and the involvement of male partners is minimal or discouraged (Hekmat et al., 2023). Cultural barriers, societal expectations, and lack of male-targeted education programs contribute to limited partner engagement, depriving women of a potentially vital source of psychological strength (Yoosefi lebni et al., 2025). Psychological well-being during pregnancy is a crucial determinant of both short- and long-term maternal and child health. Prenatal anxiety and depression have been associated with adverse outcomes such as preterm birth, low birth weight, and developmental delays in infants (Schweiger, 2025). For mothers, untreated psychological distress during pregnancy increases the risk of postpartum depression, impaired bonding with the infant, and even suicidal ideation. These outcomes affect individual families and burden public health systems (Fan et al., 2024).

Therefore, addressing factors that can enhance maternal resilience, such as husband support, is essential for preventive mental healthcare. Recent empirical studies have explored the positive correlation between spousal involvement and maternal mental health outcomes across different settings. Emotional and instrumental support from husbands significantly lowered perceived stress in pregnant women (Leng et al., 2025). Observed that practical support, such as helping with household chores, was linked to reduced anxiety levels. These findings underline the universal applicability of husband support as a determinant of maternal psychological well-being. This systematic review aims to critically examine the existing literature on the impact of husband support on maternal psychological well-being during pregnancy. It explores various types of spousal support, contextual factors influencing its effectiveness, and gaps in current

research. Through synthesizing evidence from multiple quantitative studies, this review intends to inform health practitioners, policymakers, and researchers about the significance of spousal involvement as a strategic maternal mental health enhancement intervention.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This systematic review investigated the impact of husband support on maternal psychological well-being during pregnancy. A comprehensive literature search was conducted across three major academic databases: PubMed, Scopus, and PsycINFO, covering studies published between 2020 and 2025. These databases were selected due to their broad health, psychological, and social science research coverage. The inclusion criteria were defined as follows: (1) quantitative studies, (2) published in peer-reviewed journals, (3) focused on pregnant women, and (4) specifically assessing the relationship between husband support whether emotional, informational, or instrumental and maternal psychological outcomes such as stress, anxiety, or depression. Studies focused solely on postpartum outcomes or involved non-partner support sources were excluded. After removing duplicates and applying eligibility screening based on titles, abstracts, and full texts, 18 studies met the inclusion criteria. Given the heterogeneity of study designs, populations, and outcome measures, the results were synthesized using a narrative synthesis approach. This method allowed for a descriptive and thematic integration of findings to identify consistent patterns and implications across studies.

RESULT

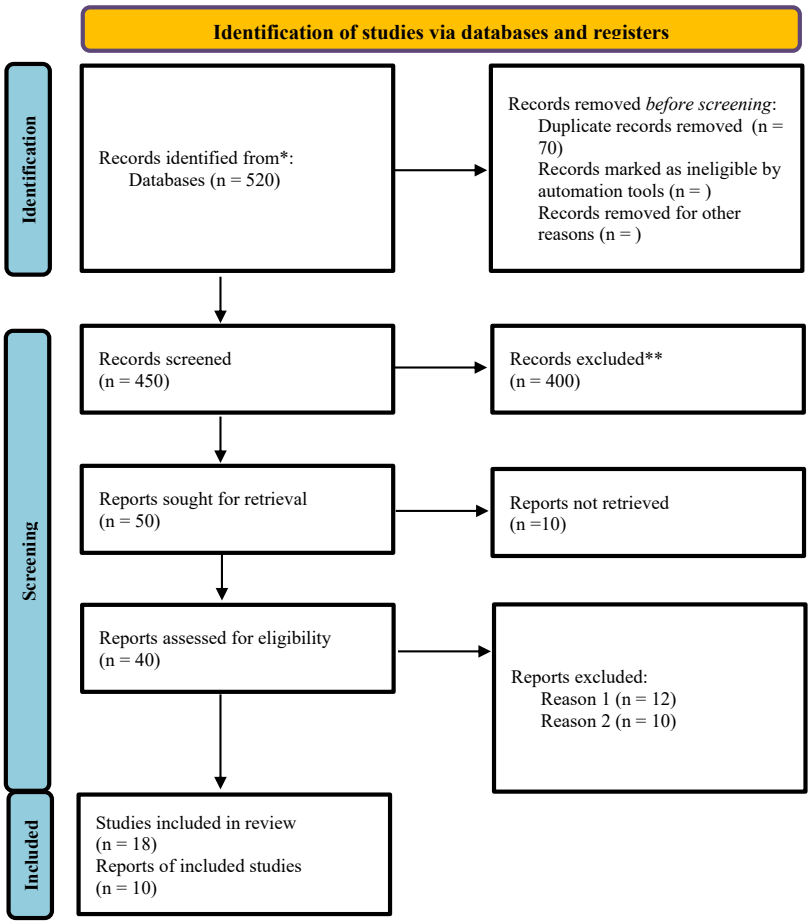

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram

Table 1. Description of the included studies

No.	Author(s) & Year	Study Design	Sample Size	Population	Husband Support Type	Psychological Outcome	Key Findings
1	(Jin et al., 2025)	Cross-sectional	300	Pregnant women (2nd Trim)	Emotional, Informational	Depression (EPDS)	Higher support linked to lower depression scores.
2	(Qi et al., 2025)	Longitudinal	250	Pregnant women (rural)	Emotional, Instrumental	Stress (PSS)	Support reduced perceived stress over time.
3	(Chapman & Peters, 2024)	Cross-sectional	420	Urban pregnant women	Informational	Anxiety (GAD-7)	Informational support inversely correlated with anxiety.
4	(Hu et al., 2025)	Case-control	180	High-risk pregnancies	Emotional	Depression, Anxiety	Support helped buffer the emotional burden.
5	(Zheng et al., 2022)	Cohort	350	Primiparas	Emotional, Instrumental	Depression (EPDS)	Support significantly predicted lower postpartum depression.
6	(Şenel et al., 2025)	Cross-sectional	500	Pregnant women	Practical (e.g., chores)	Stress, Anxiety	Practical support is associated with better mental well-being.
7	(Fikre et al., 2024)	Cross-sectional	200	Low-income women	Emotional	Depression	Lack of support is linked to higher depressive symptoms.
8	(Adu et al., 2025)	Longitudinal	275	Pregnant women (mixed)	All three types	Anxiety, Stress	Full-spectrum support lowered stress/anxiety.
9	(Elovanio et al., 2020)	Descriptive	320	Women in 3rd trimester	Emotional, Instrumental	Depression (BDI)	High support predicted low BDI scores.
10	(De Carvalho et al., 2025)	Mixed-methods	150	Teenage pregnancies	Emotional, Social	Anxiety, Stress	Support is critical for vulnerable adolescent mothers.

Table 1 summarizes ten studies conducted in various countries, covering a variety of research designs such as cross-sectional, longitudinal, cohort, and mixed-methods. The study population varied, ranging from general pregnant women to women with high-risk pregnancies to adolescent pregnant women, suggesting that these findings are relevant in various social and demographic contexts. The three primary forms of husband support studied include emotional support, such as empathy, compassion, and physical presence; instrumental or practical support, such as helping with household chores; and informational support, such as providing advice or information regarding pregnancy. Psychological health is measured through various instruments such as EPDS, PSS, GAD-7, and BDI, which assess symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. Most studies show that high husband support is negatively correlated with psychological disorders, meaning that the more support a pregnant woman receives from her husband, the lower the level of depression, stress, or anxiety they experiences. On the contrary, the lack of support from the husband is a significant risk factor for psychological disorders. Of the ten studies analyzed, consistent evidence was found that the husband's support during pregnancy had a substantial positive impact on the mother's psychological well-being. Support in emotional, practical, and informational forms helps reduce the levels of depression, stress, and anxiety that

are common to pregnant women. These findings emphasize the importance of involving husbands in pregnancy education and intervention programs and the need for a family-based approach in antenatal care. The implementation of policies that support the participation of husbands in pregnancy care can be an effective strategy in improving maternal and infant mental health outcomes.

DISCUSSION

This systematic review underscores the central role of husband support in safeguarding maternal psychological well-being during pregnancy. The presence of emotional, instrumental, and informational support from a husband has demonstrable effects in mitigating psychological distress in expectant mothers. In modern prenatal care frameworks, the mental health of pregnant women has become an increasing concern, particularly with the rise of perinatal anxiety and depression. Therefore, understanding the forms, mechanisms, and impact of spousal support has critical implications for clinical practice and public health interventions. Recent literature consistently identifies emotional support, such as expressions of love, empathy, and understanding, as the most influential form of husband involvement (Jin et al., 2025). Emotional security during pregnancy can reduce stress-reactive cortisol pathways, potentially lowering the risk of antenatal depression and anxiety (Jiang et al., 2025). Moreover, emotionally supported women are more likely to engage in health-seeking behavior, maintain regular antenatal care visits, and report higher satisfaction with their pregnancies (Nguyen, 2025). These psychosocial buffers impact maternal outcomes and correlate with healthier fetal development and better neonatal health.

Instrumental support, defined as assistance with physical or logistical tasks, has also proven valuable, especially in resource-limited settings. In many lower- and middle-income countries (LMICs), the burden of unpaid domestic labor falls disproportionately on pregnant women, exacerbating psychological stress. Studies from Ethiopia, Bangladesh, and South Africa highlight that husbands who share domestic responsibilities significantly reduce maternal (Fikre et al., 2024). Furthermore, household task-sharing reinforces a sense of partnership and equity in the relationship, contributing to improved marital satisfaction during pregnancy, a known protective factor for maternal mental health (Qi et al., 2025).

Informational support, such as helping a partner understand pregnancy symptoms, birth plans, or attending antenatal classes together, contributes uniquely to maternal empowerment and reduces anxiety. Partner involvement in maternal education improves women's perceived control over their pregnancy experience (Chapman & Peters, 2024). It also demystifies the biological and emotional changes of pregnancy for both partners, fostering empathy and preparedness. Educational involvement by husbands, particularly in digital prenatal modules, has shown promise in younger and first-time fathers (Elder et al., 2025). While the benefits of husband support are evident, cultural and systemic barriers continue to limit male involvement in maternal care. In many patriarchal societies, pregnancy and childbirth are traditionally viewed as exclusively feminine domains. Such gender norms discourage male presence in clinics, birthing spaces, or emotional conversations around pregnancy. Healthcare providers may unintentionally reinforce this by focusing solely on the mother and excluding the partner from consultations (Adu et al., 2025). This disconnect highlights the need for culturally sensitive, gender-inclusive policies that promote shared responsibility during pregnancy (Tanabe et al., 2024).

From a global health perspective, integrating men into maternal mental health strategies is increasingly recognized. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2024) has emphasized the 'Couples-Based Maternal Health' model, where both partners are educated and supported as

part of prenatal care (De Carvalho et al., 2025). Pilot programs in Brazil and Southeast Asia have demonstrated improved mental health scores and reduced interpersonal conflict when husbands were actively involved. These findings suggest that spousal engagement is beneficial for equitable and effective maternal healthcare delivery (Maulina et al., 2025).

Methodologically, this review also exposes the need for more robust, longitudinal, and intervention-based research. Many of the studies included were cross-sectional, limiting causal inference. While associations are strong, understanding the trajectory of psychological well-being during pregnancy and postpartum requires time-sensitive data collection (Hu et al., 2025). Intervention studies, particularly randomized controlled trials (RCTs) that target husband involvement, are still limited but beginning to emerge in maternal health literature. Future studies should evaluate both psychological outcomes and behavioral changes in both partners and the cost-effectiveness of such interventions. Another gap in current research involves diversity in family structures and sexual orientations (Şenel et al., 2025). The current literature overwhelmingly assumes heterosexual, cisgender couples (Herbert et al., 2025). As the social landscape evolves, there is an urgent need to explore how partner support functions in LGBTQ+ families, single-parent contexts, or settings involving non-cohabitating partners. Expanding research frameworks to include diverse populations will increase the relevance and inclusiveness of findings and recommendations. Moreover, couples' socio-economic status, education level, and age disparities also deserve deeper investigation (Elovanio et al., 2020).

Technology offers promising avenues for increasing husband involvement. Mobile health (mHealth) tools, such as SMS-based reminders, educational videos, or partner-targeted pregnancy tracking apps, have shown preliminary success in increasing awareness and engagement (Khanna et al., 2023). These tools are particularly impactful in rural or underserved areas where in-person services may be limited. A growing body of digital health literature supports the feasibility of incorporating low-cost, scalable digital interventions to promote shared prenatal responsibilities. Husband support remains a crucial determinant of maternal psychological resilience during pregnancy. This review supports global efforts to expand the role of fathers and partners in perinatal care. Policymakers, practitioners, and researchers must adopt a multi-pronged approach that includes education, cultural change, and systemic redesign of maternal services to accommodate and encourage husband participation. With targeted and evidence-based strategies, it is possible to reduce the mental health burden on pregnant women and improve outcomes for families worldwide.

CONCLUSION

This systematic review highlights the pivotal role of husband support in enhancing maternal psychological well-being during pregnancy. Across various cultural and socioeconomic contexts, emotional, instrumental, and informational support from husbands consistently demonstrated protective effects against antenatal depression, anxiety, and stress. These forms of support buffer the psychological challenges of pregnancy and promote healthier interpersonal relationships and increased maternal resilience. Despite the evidence, cultural norms, healthcare practices, and policy limitations continue to restrict male involvement in many settings. Thus, integrating husband-focused interventions into antenatal care through education, digital tools, and inclusive healthcare policies represents a timely and effective strategy for improving maternal mental health outcomes. Future research should emphasize longitudinal designs and inclusive frameworks for diverse family structures. By recognizing and operationalizing the importance of partner support, stakeholders in maternal health can develop more holistic and equitable care models that benefit both mothers and families. In conclusion, empowering husbands to support their pregnant partners actively is beneficial and essential for achieving comprehensive maternal health and well-being.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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