Rising postnatal stress worries health experts

Medical practitioners say more new mothers are reporting cases of anxiety, emotional breakdowns, and overwhelming stress shortly after delivery.

BY JANE NAFULA



Ms Miriam Halera, Founder of Maama'z Touch Recovery Home in Kiwatule(right), speaks to an expectant mother.

PHOTO/JANE NAFULA

Health experts have raised concerns over what they describe as a growing burden of postpartum stress among Ugandan women.

They attribute it largely to inadequate emotional, physical, and financial support from partners and family members during pregnancy and after childbirth.

Medical practitioners say more new mothers are reporting cases of anxiety, emotional breakdowns, and overwhelming stress shortly after delivery, conditions that affect both their well-being and that of the newborns.

Ms Beatrice Nkimpi, a medic who works in both private and public health facilities in Kampala, said strained relationships and lack of spousal support are major contributors.

"We continue to see mothers breaking down and crying on hospital beds after giving birth. On talking to them, we learn that they are struggling on their own. Women need love and care to ensure their safety and that of their babies," Ms Nkimpi said during the official opening of Maamaz Touch Recovery Home in Kiwatule, Nakawa Division.

She explained that postpartum stress manifests in psychological and emotional challenges such as anxiety, persistent worry, and feelings of being overwhelmed. Ms Nkimpi said that most of this stress comes from home, adding that Some men say they were not ready for the pregnancy or already have their desired number of children.

Grief. I cried often. I took like two weeks without bathing the baby because I didn't know what to do. Stress affected my breastmilk, forcing me to feed my baby with cassave porridge,- Rebecca Kukiriza, a singer.

Some women also face verbal abuse or psychological torture.

"During pregnancy, women experience intense hormonal changes. Therefore, things such as rejection, become overwhelming," she added.

Ms Nkimpi emphasised that adequate rest and care during pregnancy and after childbirth are critical for physical healing, reducing the risk of infections and high blood pressure, improving mother-child bonding, and enhancing breast milk production.

Personal experiences

Singer Rebecca Kukiriza, popularly known as Chosen Becky, shared her experience of postpartum struggles after giving birth to her first child at 17 years. She said the stress affected her breast milk production, forcing her to feed her baby cassava porridge since she could not afford formula milk. She only found relief after relocating to her mother's home.

Now married and expecting her fifth child, she plans to seek professional postnatal care to ensure proper rest and monitoring after delivery.

"As a mother, my life and that of my baby matter a lot. I need enough rest and someone to help monitor my child," she said.

Ms Miriam Halera, founder of Maama'z Touch recovery home, said her personal recovery challenges inspired her to start the facility.

"When I gave birth to my first children, my sister's help quicken my recovery. However, it was tough with the second child because I lacked help. I felt weak and had headaches for almost six months," she said.

She noted that physical exhaustion, sleep deprivation, and the demands of caring for a newborn often prolong the healing process.

At Mulago Specialised Women's Hospital, senior midwife Kalinaki Hajara said childbirth, whether vaginal or via Caesarean section, is physically demanding and requires proper rest and follow-up care.

"Mothers who give birth normally are discharged after 24 hours, while those who deliver by C-section are discharged after three days. They are expected to return after two weeks for review, but support at home is equally important," she said.

She added that some new mothers struggle with hygiene and breastfeeding, challenges that can be addressed through proper guidance and support.

Ms Phoebe Nzora, who is expecting her second child, said many women silently endure stress due to lack of assistance.

"There is nothing more traumatising than a baby crying endlessly yet there is no one to give you a helping hand," she said.

Health experts are now urging men and families to play a more active role in supporting mothers during and after pregnancy, noting that community awareness and structured recovery support systems could significantly reduce the burden of postpartum stress.

As Uganda continues to prioritize maternal health, Stakeholders say addressing the emotional and psychological well-being of mothers must become an integral part of postnatal care.

POSTPARTUM CARE

According to the World Health Organisation, quality postnatal care, specifically in the first six weeks, is essential for reducing maternal and newborn mortality. WHO guidelines emphasise the need for both physical and mental health support during the postnatal period, calling for timely and comprehensive care to address immediate and long-term health needs.

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