

Promoting Maternal Well-Being Under Prolonged and Cumulative Stress: The Roles of Perceived Childbirth Risk, Self-Compassion, And Intolerance of Uncertainty

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Abstract

Childbirth under conditions of prolonged and cumulative stress presents a unique psychological challenge. When uncertainty and perceived danger are heightened, mothers' internal coping resources may be strained, increasing vulnerability to reduced psychological well-being. However, the mechanisms linking perceived childbirth risk to postpartum adjustment and mental health remain insufficiently understood.

This study examined how perceived risk during childbirth, self-compassion, and intolerance of uncertainty (IU) interact to predict postpartum psychological well-being among mothers exposed to prolonged and cumulative stress.

Ninety-six women who gave birth while temporarily displaced under crisis-related conditions completed validated measures of perceived childbirth risk, self-compassion, IU, and current psychological well-being. A moderated mediation model (PROCESS Model 7) was tested, controlling for maternal age, income, and objective obstetric risk. Higher perceived childbirth risk was associated with lower self-compassion, which in turn predicted lower psychological well-being. Self-compassion fully mediated the link between perceived risk and well-being. This indirect pathway was significant only among women with high IU levels, indicating that IU intensified the relationship between perceived childbirth risk and psychological well-being. Among women with low or moderate IU, perceived risk was not associated with well-being, suggesting greater resilience.

Self-compassion emerged as a key internal resource supporting maternal well-being under prolonged stress, while IU functioned as a personality-based vulnerability factor determining when perceived risk translates into distress. Screening for high IU during pregnancy may help identify women at greater risk for postpartum difficulties. Preventive interventions that cultivate self-compassion and tolerance for uncertainty could promote psychological resilience and adaptive adjustment among mothers in adverse environments.

Keywords: Childbirth, intolerance of uncertainty, perceived risk, prolonged stress, self-compassion