

## SOCIAL MEDIA EXPOSURE AND MATERNAL ANXIETY DURING PREGNANCY

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### Abstract

The pregnancy journey in the digital era is no longer solely influenced by the support of family and healthcare professionals, but also by the constant flow of information through social media. This study aims to analyze the relationship between social media exposure and maternal anxiety in pregnant women through a literature review approach. The method used was a literature review, examining various relevant national and international scientific articles on social media use by pregnant women and its impact on mental health. The study results indicate that high levels of social media use, particularly exposure to negative information about pregnancy complications, childbirth, and other people's traumatic experiences, are associated with increased levels of maternal anxiety. Conversely, educational social media use supported by credible information sources can help increase knowledge, self-confidence, and emotional support for pregnant women. These findings confirm that the influence of social media on maternal anxiety is ambivalent, depending on the quality of the information, digital literacy skills, and social support available to pregnant women. Therefore, efforts to improve digital health literacy and support from healthcare professionals are needed to enable pregnant women to use social media wisely and adaptively during pregnancy.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Maternal Anxiety, Pregnancy, Maternal Mental Health, Digital Health Literacy

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## INTRODUCTION

Pregnancy is a transitional period marked by various physical, psychological, social, and emotional changes that can impact a woman's well-being (Zeeni et al., 2023a). During this period, pregnant women face not only biological changes related to fetal development but also various psychological challenges arising from uncertainty regarding their own health and that of their unborn baby. One psychological issue frequently experienced during pregnancy is maternal anxiety. Maternal anxiety refers to feelings of worry, fear, or anxiety related to the pregnancy process, childbirth, and the health of the fetus. To some extent, anxiety is a normal response to the changes and challenges faced during pregnancy. However, if it occurs excessively and persists over a prolonged period, anxiety can negatively impact both maternal health and fetal development. Various studies have shown that high levels of anxiety during pregnancy have the potential to increase the risk of sleep disorders, prolonged stress, pregnancy complications, and even impaired emotional and behavioral development in children later in life (Samra & Dryer, 2024).

Developments in information and communication technology in recent decades have transformed the way society obtains information, including information related to pregnancy health. The emergence of social media as one of the most widely used digital platforms has created a new space for pregnant women to seek information, share experiences, and gain social support from online communities. Platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and various pregnancy discussion forums provide quick and easy access to a wide range of information regarding fetal development, healthy lifestyles during pregnancy, childbirth preparation, and even the personal experiences of other mothers. This ease of access makes social media a primary source of information frequently used by women during pregnancy (Hansen et al., 2025).

The increasing use of social media by pregnant women is inextricably linked to the need for fast, practical, and easy-to-understand information. In many cases, social media can fill information gaps that are not always accessible through direct consultations with healthcare professionals. Various online communities provide opportunities for pregnant women to share experiences, gain emotional support, and build a sense of community with individuals experiencing similar conditions. The presence of this virtual social support often helps reduce feelings of loneliness, increase self-confidence, and provide reassurance in navigating the changes during pregnancy (Musken et al.,

2023a). Therefore, social media has great potential as a means of education and empowerment for pregnant women.

However, the ease of access to information through social media also presents various challenges that require attention. One issue increasingly discussed in maternal health studies is the increased anxiety caused by excessive exposure to information on social media. Unlike scientifically verified health information sources, content circulating on social media often stems from personal experiences, individual opinions, or unverified information. This leaves pregnant women vulnerable to receiving inaccurate, misleading, or even unnecessary fear-inducing information. Posts about pregnancy complications, traumatic childbirth experiences, and conflicting health information can trigger excessive worry and increase maternal anxiety (The Impact of Social Media Addiction on Pregnancy Stress and Prenatal Attachment | African Journal of Reproductive Health, n.d.).

Furthermore, the nature of social media, which allows users to constantly compare themselves to others, contributes to anxiety during pregnancy. Much content portrays idealized pregnancy experiences, perceived physical conditions, and seemingly easy and uncomplicated labor processes. Exposure to this type of content can lead to unrealistic social comparisons, causing pregnant women to feel that their pregnancy experience does not meet the standards portrayed on social media. Feelings of inability to meet these expectations can cause psychological distress, leading to increased anxiety, decreased self-confidence, and dissatisfaction with one's condition. (Steube et al., 2022)

Furthermore, social media algorithms designed to display content tailored to users' interests also have the potential to amplify exposure to information related to pregnancy concerns. When a pregnant woman searches for information about a particular risk or symptom she is experiencing, social media systems tend to recommend similar content repeatedly. As a result, users may be continually exposed to anxiety-provoking information without gaining a balanced perspective. This situation can create a cycle of escalating anxiety and impact the mother's psychological well-being throughout pregnancy.

The influence of social media on maternal anxiety varies from individual to individual. Digital literacy levels, ability to evaluate information, social support, and pre-pregnancy psychological well-being are all factors that can influence how a mother responds to information obtained through social media. Pregnant women with good digital literacy skills tend to be better able

to distinguish between valid and invalid information, thus minimizing the risk of anxiety arising from misinformation. Conversely, poor ability to assess the credibility of information can increase vulnerability to misinformation and magnify the negative impact of social media on mental health (Zhang et al., 2023).

The increasing use of social media among pregnant women and its potential impact on mental health demonstrates that this issue is highly relevant in the context of maternal health in the digital age. A comprehensive understanding of the relationship between social media exposure and maternal anxiety is needed to support the development of effective intervention strategies. Health workers, policymakers, and maternal health service providers need to consider the role of social media as a factor influencing modern women's pregnancy experiences. Furthermore, efforts to improve digital literacy and evidence-based health education are increasingly important so that pregnant women can use social media wisely and critically.

Given these conditions, a literature review on the relationship between social media exposure and maternal anxiety during pregnancy is crucial. Through an analysis of various published studies, this study is expected to provide a more in-depth understanding of the benefits and risks of social media use during pregnancy, factors influencing maternal anxiety, and implications that can be used as a basis for developing mental health education and support programs for pregnant women. Thus, social media is viewed not only as a means of communication and information, but also as a factor that has a significant influence on maternal psychological well-being during pregnancy.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study used a literature review method to analyze and synthesize various research findings related to social media exposure and maternal anxiety during pregnancy. This method was chosen because it allows researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of conceptual developments, factors influencing the relationship between social media use and maternal mental health, and its implications for maternal health practices in the digital age. The literature review was conducted systematically by collecting, analyzing, comparing, and interpreting relevant research findings to generate broader conclusions based on available scientific evidence.

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis approach. At this stage, information obtained from various sources was categorized based on similarities in concepts and research findings. Next, a synthesis process was

conducted to integrate related research findings to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between social media exposure and maternal anxiety. The results of the synthesis were then presented descriptively and critically to explain trends in findings, research gaps, and implications that can be used as a basis for developing strategies for mental health education and support for pregnant women.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Role of Social Media as a Source of Information and Social Support for Pregnant Women**

The development of digital technology has transformed the way people access health information, including for women during pregnancy. Social media is now one of the most easily accessible sources of information for pregnant women, providing a variety of content related to maternal health, fetal development, nutrition during pregnancy, childbirth preparation, and postpartum care. The presence of platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and various online forums allows pregnant women to quickly access information without being limited by time and space. This ease of access makes social media a widely used tool to meet information needs during pregnancy, especially for mothers with limited access to health services or other formal information sources (Lee & Lee, 2022a).

In the context of maternal health, social media serves as a bridge connecting pregnant women with various sources of knowledge that were previously difficult to access. Various accounts managed by healthcare professionals, hospitals, health organizations, and communities of pregnant women provide educational information that can help improve understanding of the pregnancy process. Information presented in the form of infographics, short videos, podcasts, and live broadcasts is considered easier to understand than conventional information sources. Through social media, pregnant women can learn the signs of a normal pregnancy, recognize the symptoms of complications, understand the importance of antenatal care, and obtain guidance on healthy eating and lifestyle habits during pregnancy (Sarı & Sönmez, 2025). Thus, social media serves not only as a means of communication but also as a health education platform, contributing to improving maternal health literacy.

In addition to providing access to health information, social media also serves as a space for social interaction, enabling pregnant women to gain emotional support from others who have similar experiences. Pregnancy is

often accompanied by various physical, psychological, and social changes that can cause anxiety, uncertainty, and stress. In these situations, the existence of online communities provides opportunities for pregnant women to share experiences, exchange information, and receive moral support from fellow community members. Interactions within social media groups can create a sense of community and reduce feelings of isolation that pregnant women may experience, especially those with limited social support in their local communities (Conrad, 2024a).

Social support received through social media can take the form of emotional support, informational support, and social recognition. Emotional support is reflected in encouragement, empathy, and psychological reinforcement when pregnant women face various challenges during pregnancy (Vogels-Broeke et al., 2022). Informational support is obtained through sharing experiences regarding prenatal checkups, delivery options, or how to address common complaints during gestation. Meanwhile, social esteem support arises when community members express appreciation and recognition for the experiences or decisions made by pregnant women. These various forms of support can increase a mother's confidence during pregnancy and help reduce the anxiety that often arises from uncertainty about the condition of herself and her fetus (Chaudhary et al., 2023).

Furthermore, social media also enables two-way communication between pregnant women and healthcare professionals. Many healthcare professionals utilize digital platforms to provide health education, answer public questions, and disseminate evidence-based information. This provides opportunities for pregnant women to obtain more accurate and reliable information than relying solely on the personal experiences of other users. Direct interaction with healthcare professionals through comments, private messages, and online Q&A sessions can help pregnant women obtain clarification regarding information they find online. The presence of health workers in the digital space is important to reduce the information gap and prevent the spread of information that is not in accordance with evidence-based health principles.

However, utilizing social media as a source of health information also presents various challenges. One major issue is the abundance of unverified and potentially misleading information. Social media algorithms allow information to spread rapidly without adequate scientific validation. As a result, pregnant women can be exposed to various myths, misinformation about health, and sensational content. Exposure to conflicting or excessive information can cause confusion, increase worry, and even trigger anxiety related to pregnancy.

Therefore, digital literacy skills are crucial for pregnant women to be able to select credible sources of information and avoid making health decisions based on unreliable information (Al-Mutawtah et al., 2023).

On the other hand, social media can be a means of empowering pregnant women in making decisions about their health. Access to a variety of information allows mothers to more actively seek knowledge and participate in the decision-making process regarding pregnancy care. This increased knowledge can foster a more collaborative relationship between pregnant women and healthcare providers, as mothers gain a better understanding of their condition. From a public health perspective, this condition has the potential to increase awareness of the importance of routine pregnancy check-ups, implementing a healthy lifestyle, and compliance with medical recommendations given by health workers.

### **The Impact of Exposure to Social Media Content on Increasing Maternal Anxiety During Pregnancy**

The development of digital technology has transformed the way pregnant women obtain information related to pregnancy health, childbirth, and infant care. Social media has become one of the most accessible sources of information, offering a variety of content in the form of text, images, videos, and personal experiences from other users (Chee et al., 2023). The presence of social media offers benefits in the form of increased access to health information and social support that were previously difficult to obtain. However, despite these benefits, excessive exposure to social media content can also impact the psychological well-being of pregnant women, particularly by increasing maternal anxiety. Maternal anxiety is an emotional state characterized by worry, fear, and uncertainty regarding the condition of oneself and one's fetus during pregnancy. In the context of social media use, this anxiety can be triggered by various types of information received without adequate filtering (Wang et al., 2022).

One of the main factors contributing to increased maternal anxiety is exposure to unverified health information. Social media allows anyone to share experiences and opinions about pregnancy without scientific validation (Şanlı et al., 2025). As a result, pregnant women are often exposed to information that is misleading, exaggerated, or even contradicts the recommendations of healthcare professionals. Information about pregnancy complications, the risk of miscarriage, fetal abnormalities, or traumatic childbirth experiences can create a perception of greater threat than the actual situation. When pregnant

women repeatedly read or watch content depicting negative experiences, they tend to generalize about their own condition. This situation can lead to excessive concern about the health of the fetus and the upcoming delivery process (Zeeni et al., 2023b).

Furthermore, social media algorithms designed to display content tailored to users' interests have the potential to reinforce the cycle of anxiety. When a pregnant woman searches for information about a particular symptom or pregnancy risk, the algorithm system will continually recommend more similar content. As a result, users are repeatedly exposed to information about a particular health issue, creating the perception that the condition is very common or likely to occur in their own life (Jones et al., 2024). This phenomenon can exacerbate fear and increase the tendency to engage in compulsive information-seeking. Instead of finding peace of mind, pregnant women are increasingly trapped in a cycle of anxiety due to constant exposure to information about potential pregnancy risks and complications.

Another equally significant impact is the emergence of social comparison behavior. Social media often displays representations of life that have been curated and edited to appear more ideal than reality. Much content depicts pregnancy as a consistently enjoyable experience, with ideal bodies, harmonious family relationships, and perfect preparation for childbirth. Exposure to these idealized images can lead pregnant women to compare themselves with others. When there is a discrepancy between expectations and reality, feelings of inadequacy, lack of confidence, and concerns about their ability to endure pregnancy can increase. Continuous social comparison has the potential to reduce psychological well-being and increase the risk of anxiety during pregnancy (Chee et al., 2024).

Maternal anxiety can also increase due to the consumption of emotional and sensational content. Social media platforms tend to place greater emphasis on content that triggers emotional responses in users. Therefore, stories about miscarriages, childbirth complications, maternal or infant deaths, and traumatic medical experiences often receive high engagement and are more easily shared. While these experiences are important for education and information sharing, excessive exposure can create disproportionate fear in pregnant women. Individuals with high levels of emotional sensitivity are more susceptible to increased anxiety after viewing or reading content containing elements of fear and uncertainty (Http, n.d.).

On the other hand, intense social media use can also impact mental health through more complex psychological mechanisms. Pregnant women

experiencing anxiety are often driven to continuously seek information to gain certainty about their condition. However, excessive information seeking can actually result in increasingly diverse and sometimes contradictory information. This condition is known as information overload, a situation where individuals receive too much information, making it difficult to understand, evaluate, and make informed decisions. When the information obtained is conflicting, the level of uncertainty increases and anxiety becomes increasingly difficult to manage. As a result, pregnant women can experience impaired concentration, difficulty sleeping, and increased stress, which impacts quality of life during pregnancy (Muskens et al., 2023b).

However, the impact of social media on maternal anxiety is not always negative. The effects that emerge depend greatly on the type of content consumed, the user's digital literacy skills, and the quality of social support received through the platform. Social media can be a beneficial tool when used to access information from credible sources, participate in evidence-based health education, and build support networks with other pregnant women and healthcare professionals. The emotional support received from online communities can help reduce feelings of loneliness, boost self-confidence, and provide reassurance that pregnancy challenges can be successfully addressed. However, these benefits can only be achieved if users are able to critically evaluate information and avoid relying solely on social media as their sole source of health information.

### **Digital Literacy, Social Support, and Social Media Utilization Strategies to Support the Mental Health of Pregnant Women**

The development of digital technology has transformed the way people obtain health information, including information related to pregnancy and maternal health (Zingg et al., 2023). Social media has become one of the most accessible sources of information for pregnant women, providing a variety of content on fetal development, pregnancy nutrition, childbirth preparation, and even personal experiences of other mothers. This ease of access provides a significant opportunity to increase maternal knowledge and preparedness during pregnancy. However, the benefits of social media do not always translate into improved mental health if users lack adequate digital literacy skills. Digital literacy is a crucial factor in determining a pregnant woman's ability to search for, understand, evaluate, and use health information appropriately. This ability helps mothers distinguish valid, evidence-based

information from information that is inaccurate, misleading, or potentially anxiety-inducing (Conrad, 2024b).

In the context of mental health, digital literacy serves as a protective mechanism against the negative impacts of information overload. Pregnant women often experience various physical, hormonal, and psychological changes that can increase sensitivity to the information they receive. When exposed to content about pregnancy complications, traumatic childbirth experiences, or unverified medical information, mothers with low digital literacy levels are more likely to experience excessive worry and fear. Conversely, mothers with good digital literacy skills are able to verify information through trusted sources, understand the context of the information obtained, and avoid generalizing individual experiences shared on social media (Liblub et al., 2024). Thus, digital literacy serves not only as a technical skill in using technology but also as a cognitive ability that supports mental health during pregnancy.

In addition to digital literacy, social support is an important factor contributing to the psychological well-being of pregnant women. Social support can come from partners, family, health professionals, peers, and online communities formed through social media. The presence of adequate social support has been shown to reduce stress, anxiety, and feelings of loneliness often experienced during pregnancy. In the digital age, social media provides a space for pregnant women to connect with individuals who have shared similar experiences, creating a sense of community and emotional understanding that is difficult to achieve in everyday life. Through discussion groups, community forums, and health education accounts, pregnant women can share experiences, ask questions, and receive emotional support from other community members (Baumel, 2023).

Social support obtained through social media is unique because it is not limited by geographical distance or time. A pregnant woman can access a support community anytime when she needs help or information. This is especially important for mothers who live in areas with limited access to healthcare services or who have limited access to in-person social support. Positive interactions within online communities can boost self-confidence, strengthen stress coping skills, and help mothers face the challenges of pregnancy with more optimism. However, the quality of social support received still needs to be considered, as not all interactions on social media are constructive. Negative comments, unhealthy social comparisons, or the spread

of inaccurate information can diminish the benefits of social support and even worsen a mother's psychological well-being (Lee & Lee, 2022b).

Therefore, appropriate strategies for utilizing social media are needed so that digital platforms can become a tool that supports the mental health of pregnant women. One strategy that can be implemented is improving information selection skills by following accounts or communities managed by healthcare professionals, health institutions, or organizations with high credibility. Selecting trusted sources of information can reduce the risk of exposure to misleading information and help mothers obtain knowledge appropriate to their pregnancy needs. Furthermore, pregnant women need to make a habit of cross-checking information obtained by consulting with healthcare professionals before making decisions regarding their own health or that of their fetus (George et al., 2023).

Another strategy is developing a healthy and balanced social media usage pattern. Excessive social media use can increase the risk of mental exhaustion due to constant exposure to information. Therefore, pregnant women need to regulate the duration of social media use, avoid consuming anxiety-provoking content, and allow sufficient time for activities that support physical and psychological health, such as light exercise, relaxation, family interaction, and adequate rest. This approach is crucial for creating a balance between digital technology use and mental health needs during pregnancy (Henton & Swanson, 2023).

In addition to managing usage duration, effective social media strategies also include developing emotional regulation skills in online interactions. Pregnant women need to be aware that not all pregnancy experiences shared by other users can be used as a guide for their own. Every pregnancy has different characteristics and risks, so excessive comparison can lead to unnecessary anxiety. The ability to filter information based on personal needs and actual health conditions can help mothers maintain emotional stability during pregnancy. Furthermore, social media can be used as a means of gaining motivation, inspiration, and positive education that supports preparedness for childbirth and parenthood.

The role of health workers is also crucial in optimizing the use of social media to support the mental health of pregnant women. Health workers can participate in the dissemination of accurate, educational, and easy-to-understand information through various digital platforms. The presence of health workers in digital spaces can improve the quality of available information and help reduce the spread of health hoaxes often found on social media.

Furthermore, educational programs on digital health literacy can be developed as part of antenatal care to equip pregnant women with the skills to access and critically evaluate health information.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of a literature review, social media exposure has a significant impact on maternal psychological well-being during pregnancy. Social media serves as a platform that facilitates access to information related to pregnancy health, fetal development, childbirth preparation, and social support from online communities with similar experiences. The existence of various digital platforms can help increase knowledge, self-confidence, and feelings of social connection, thus contributing to maternal well-being. However, these benefits are not without associated risks. Exposure to excessive information, unverified content, negative experiences shared by other users, and the tendency to engage in social comparison can increase maternal anxiety and lead to excessive worry during pregnancy.

This study also shows that the impact of social media on maternal anxiety is influenced by various factors, such as digital literacy levels, the ability to filter information, social support, and the mother's psychological condition before and during pregnancy. Therefore, social media use needs to be balanced with critical thinking skills in assessing the credibility of information and supported by evidence-based health education. The role of health workers, families, and relevant institutions is crucial in providing support and strengthening digital literacy for pregnant women so that social media can be utilized positively. With more judicious use, social media has the potential to be an effective educational and support medium to improve maternal mental health and well-being during pregnancy, while minimizing the risk of excessive maternal anxiety.

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