

**Title:** Exploring midwives' and mothers' views on extending postnatal care to one year.

**Background** For long-term health and well-being, the first six weeks after childbirth are crucial for mother and child.<sup>1</sup> However, many mothers experience physical or mental health problems for up to one year.<sup>2,3</sup> In the Netherlands, postnatal care is mainly provided up to six weeks after birth, which may be too short for preventing, detecting or treating health problems.

**Aim** This study explored midwives' views on possibly extending postnatal care until one year and, on the other hand, on mothers' experiences and views on (extending) the postnatal care period.

**Methods** In March 2022, we conducted an observational quantitative cross-sectional study among practising midwives, collecting data through a digital questionnaire based on the literature. In March and April 2023, we conducted the same kind type of study among mothers who had given birth between ten months and three years previously. We mainly performed descriptive analyses and, for the qualitative part among the mothers, an exploratory 'thematic content analysis' using document analysis.

**Results** Of the 113 midwives included in the study, midwives were satisfied with the current six-week period of care. On the other hand, they also thought it would be useful to extend the postnatal care period; 81% of midwives were open to being available for questions and consultations for up to twelve months, on condition that this was reimbursed by the health insurance.

Of the 260 mothers included, 88.5% experienced complaints in the first year postpartum; the most mentioned complaints were fatigue (62.7%), back pain (34.2%), depression (33.5%), and urine incontinence (30.4%). The majority of mothers experienced the current postnatal care as sufficient to excellent (65%), but unpleasant treatment, lack of information and organization of care were mentioned as main themes for improving care. On the other hand, the majority of mothers needed more care (69.1%) and preferred additional individual consultations in the first year postpartum as the ideal form of care. There was no association between receiving a six-week consultation (66.4%) and the need for more postnatal care.

**Discussion (including limitations)** This study provides insights into new mothers' complaints, needs, and midwives' views on postnatal care for up to one year. The care could be improved through more specific information about possible complaints in the first year, knowing which healthcare provider to go to, and a new organization of the postnatal period.

Our exploratory study cannot be generalised to the larger populations of mothers and health care professionals. Further research in a larger population of mothers, among family doctors and midwives, and outside the coronavirus period is needed to confirm our findings.

**Implications and future perspectives** Most new mothers have several physical and mental health problems up to one year after childbirth and miss information about which healthcare provider to visit. Therefore, maternity care policy should consider extending and reorganising the postnatal period so that mothers know where to get the right care.

## References:

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