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Experts call for urgent action on perinatal mental health in India

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Prevalence rates for perinatal depression ranged from 14 - 24% in community-based studies



The George Institute for Global Health India hosted a National Expert Consultation on Perinatal Mental Health and Social Determinants in New Delhi today, 22nd September 2025. The consultation highlighted the urgent need to create a roadmap for action and to improve perinatal mental health whilst addressing its' key social determinants, particularly for women in rural India.

The discussion focused on the urgent need to integrate perinatal maternal mental health into national programmes, noting that while women's mental health is mentioned in policies, there is no dedicated programme or screening mechanism in place.

Speaking at the consultation, Prof. Pallab Maulik, Director of Research, The George Institute for Global Health India, said, "Perinatal mental health is a major concern in India with large number of women with undiagnosed and untreated perinatal depression and psychosis which not only affect the mother but also the health of the baby and wellbeing of the family."

The consultation was held as part of the Perinatal Mental Health (PRAMH) Project, led by The George Institute for Global Health India in partnership with the University of Oxford, supported by the UK Medical Research Council. Findings shared from the PRAMH study in Telangana and Haryana highlighted the importance of engaging with perinatal women on their mental health and emphasised the need for scalable, culturally sensitive interventions integrated within health systems.

The PRAMH study is working to integrate perinatal mental health into routine maternal care by addressing barriers such as poverty, gender inequity, domestic violence, and stigma. After identifying critical gaps in states like Telangana and Haryana, Phase 2 of the PRAMH study tested practical, scalable models to ensure mothers in rural India receive timely and culturally sensitive support.

India has more than 25 million births per year, but most women with mental health problems during pregnancy and one year after birth (the perinatal period) go undetected and untreated, especially in rural areas.

A recent systematic review among perinatal women in India found that the prevalence rates for perinatal depression ranged from 14 - 24% in community-based studies, while some meta-analyses reported a pooled estimate of around 22% for postpartum depression.

Another cause for concern is that, although maternal mortality in India has reduced by over 50% since the early 2000s to 97 deaths per 100,000, maternal suicide constitutes an increasing proportion of maternal deaths. A recent report in Kerala estimated that maternal suicide accounted for nearly one in five maternal deaths in 2020.