

14 - 16 August 2026

Berlin , Germany

Sociocultural Factors and Stress Associated with Prenatal Depression among Rural Women in Western India: A Mixed Methods Study

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Abstract

Perinatal depression is a major public health concern in low- and middle-income countries, yet evidence on community-based research and sociocultural influences during pregnancy remains limited in rural India. This mixed-methods cross-sectional study assessed the prevalence of prenatal depression, examined its association with social determinants, and explored contributing stressors among pregnant women in rural Western India. Between June and December 2025, 311 third-trimester pregnant women from 35 villages were recruited with support from Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs). Socio-demographic, obstetric, socioeconomic, and sociocultural data were collected through structured interviews, and prenatal depression was screened using the Marathi Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS; cut-off ≥ 10). Additionally, 35 women reporting stress participated in in-depth interviews. Overall, 24.5% of participants were at risk of prenatal depression. Depression was significantly associated with lower education, pregnancy complications, negative or neutral family attitudes toward pregnancy, spousal conflict, and self-reported stress (all $p < 0.05$). Qualitative findings revealed that psychological distress was shaped by multidimensional stressors, gendered expectations, and complex emotional experiences. These findings highlight the influence of social and psychosocial determinants on prenatal depression and underscore the need to integrate routine mental health screening and family-centred psychosocial support into rural maternal healthcare services.

Keywords: Mental Health; Prenatal Depression; Rural India; Social Determinants; Stress