

POSTPARTUM PARENTS' EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING AND PHYSICAL HEALTH AFFECT THEIR CAREGIVING ABILITIES

To get a better sense of the experiences of those parenting new babies, the RAPID Survey Project surveyed postpartum parents in the first two months after their child was born.

Having a new baby in the home is an exciting time for most families. Caring for a new baby can also be a stressful experience, as parents navigate having to care for themselves and other family members. The stress that can come from parenting a new baby can affect parents' overall health and well-being, leading to anxiety and distress. This can, in turn, feed back and drive increases in children's levels of distress.



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In a previous fact sheet, RAPID documented pregnant parents' experiences with accessing prenatal healthcare and other services for parents of newborns and infants. In this fact sheet, we build on

those findings by documenting parents' experiences after pregnancy, labor, and delivery. Data were gathered from July 2021 through July 2023.

POSTPARTUM PARENTS SHARED HIGHLY POSITIVE EXPERIENCES OF CARING FOR AND BONDING WITH THEIR BABY

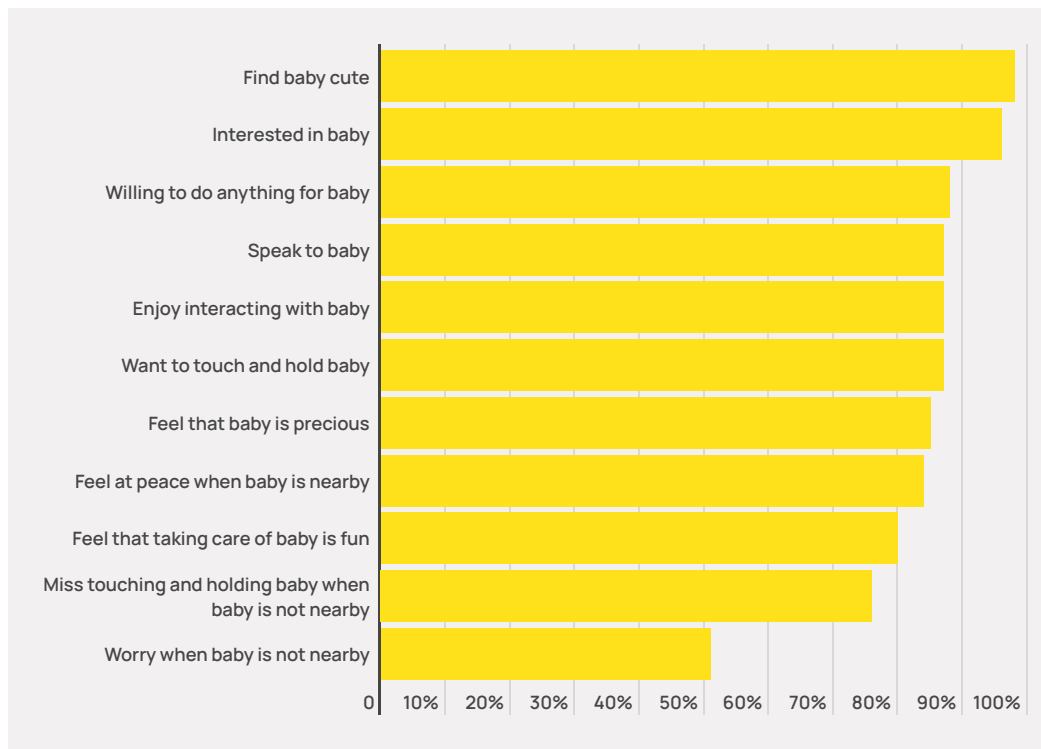
We asked postpartum parents about their feelings and attitudes toward their newborn. Nearly all postpartum parents said they found their baby cute (98%) and were interested in their baby (96%). The majority of postpartum parents (87%) said they enjoyed interacting with their baby always

or most of the time and that they spoke to their baby when caring for them. More than 80% said they enjoyed touching and holding their baby, that they felt at peace with their baby nearby, and that taking care of their baby was fun for them.

“Our loved ones and friends offer a listening ear and provide valuable perspectives when we face challenges, contributing to problem-solving and resilience.”

Parent in New Jersey

Postpartum parents' reported interactions with their baby, all participants



“I loved to cuddle with my baby.”

Parent in Illinois

TIRED, DISORGANIZED, AND ISOLATED WERE THE MOST PREVALENT FEELINGS AMONG POSTPARTUM PARENTS

We also asked parents about their feelings during the two months after their baby was born. The vast majority (96%) of postpartum parents said they felt tired. Additionally, 89% said they felt disorganized.

Postpartum parents frequently reported feeling isolated (79%). Moreover, parents reported a lack of social support: one in three said that they did not feel supported (32%). When asked about available resources and support, more than one in four (27%) said they did not have “enough support from family and friends during pregnancy and postpartum.” Additionally,

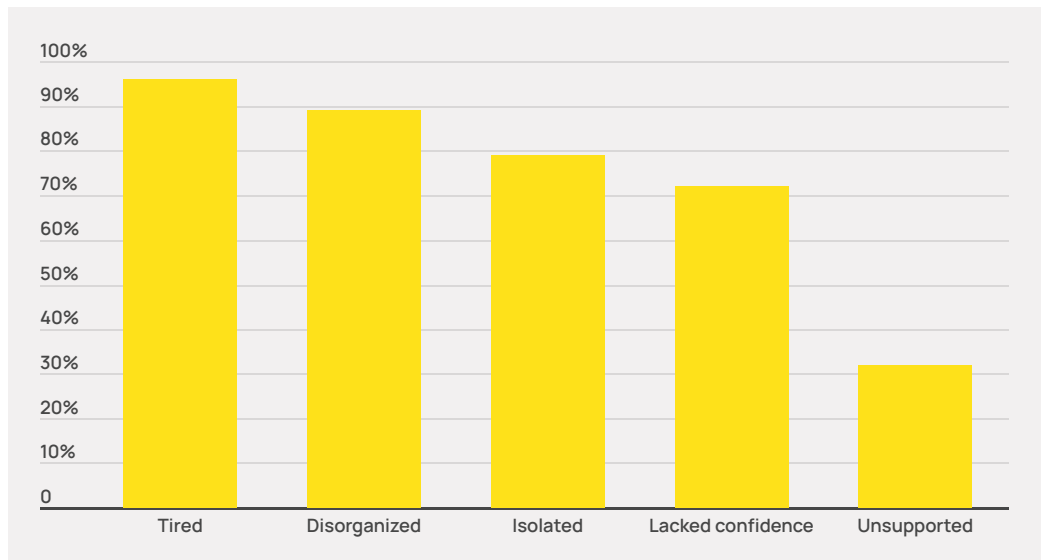
a large proportion of postpartum parents said they felt a lack of confidence in their caregiving abilities (72%).

A previous fact sheet explored the challenges that pregnant parents faced accessing services and supports that prepared them for birth and a new baby, such as childbirth classes, new parent and breastfeeding support groups, and prenatal yoga classes. Not only are these opportunities important educational experiences for pregnant and postpartum parents, but they can also play a part in building confidence in parenting and providing social connections.

“The biggest challenge was not feeling like I had enough support. My husband had very limited time off of work, and there isn’t anyone else in our lives who was willing to come over and help a lot. This left me feeling lonely, exhausted, and overwhelmed most of the time.”

Parent in Illinois

Parents’ reported feelings during postpartum period, all participants



“It has been extremely difficult juggling all of my responsibilities at this time and feel like it is taking a toll on me physically. I feel very worn out and exhausted as I’m sure everyone does anymore. Everything feels like a challenge, the juggling act.”

Parent in Alabama

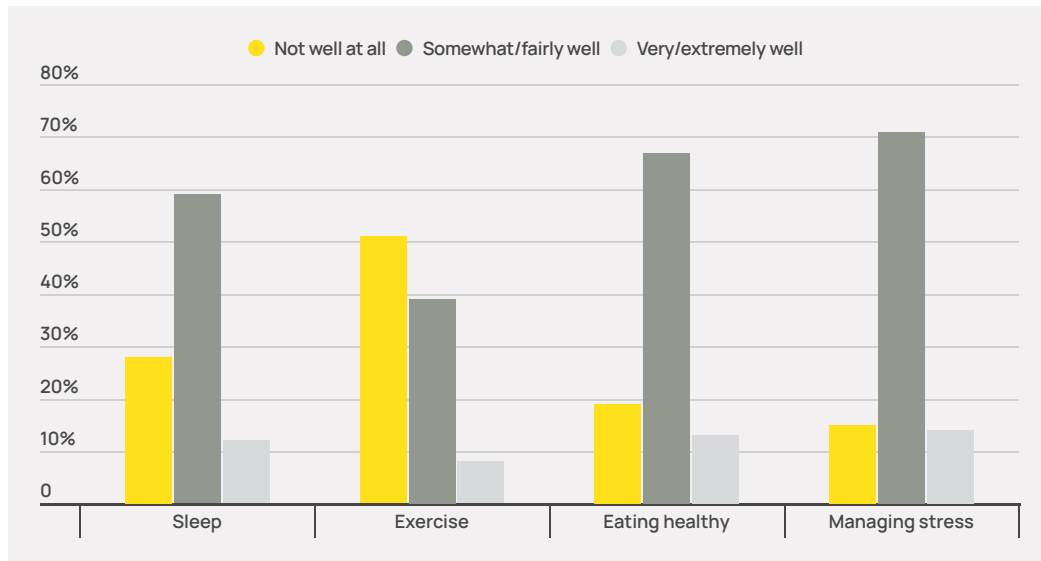
POSTPARTUM PARENTS ENGAGED IN HEALTH-PROMOTING ACTIVITIES, BUT THERE ARE AREAS OF CONCERN

Diet, exercise, and sleep can affect parents' stress levels, emotional well-being, and physical health. A vast majority of postpartum parents shared they felt they were managing their stress well (85%) and eating a healthy diet (80%).

However, about half (51%) of postpartum parents said they were "not doing well at all" in getting enough exercise. One in four

postpartum parents (28%) said they were "not doing well at all" in getting enough sleep. Among those who reported issues with sleep, lower-income postpartum parents (below 200% FPL) were more likely than higher-income postpartum parents (above 400% FPL) to report that they were "not doing well at all" in getting enough sleep.

Postpartum parents' participation in well-being activities, by level of engagement



"Lack of sleep and (unrecognized) postpartum anxiety that fed into one another. My child's bottle refusal, thus being the default caregiver 24/7 with inability to be separated from him for any meaningful amount of time."

Parent in Massachusetts

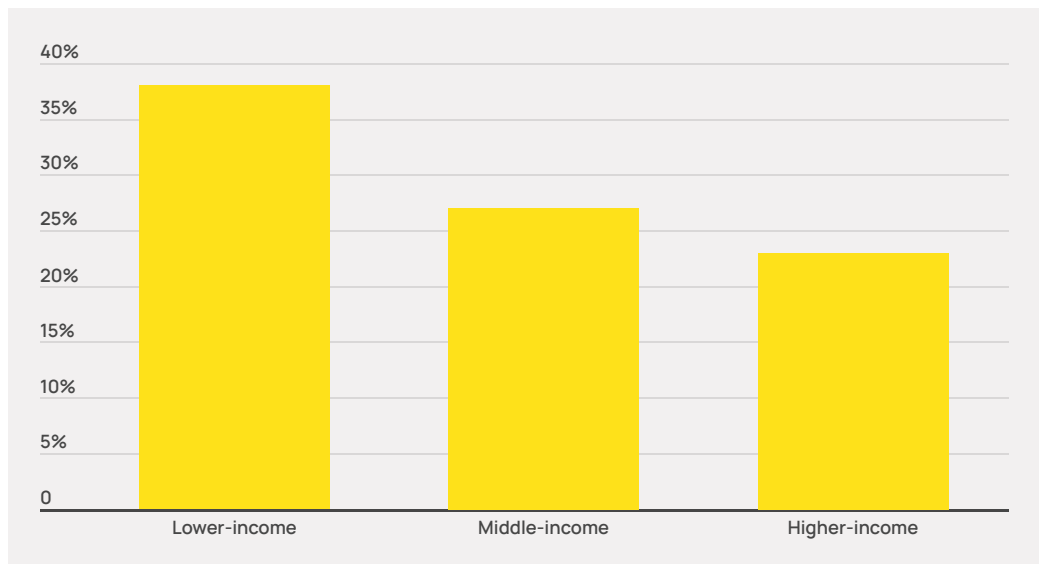
"Caring for two under 2, balancing being a new mom of two and going back to work, finding childcare, breastfeeding, finding time for self care."

Parent in California

"He didn't sleep well at all for months. Woke up hourly a lot. We also didn't have family nearby and were new to our area so felt alone."

Parent in Minnesota

Postpartum parents who reported 'Not Well at All' for getting sleep, by income level



HALF OF POSTPARTUM PARENTS SAID THEIR EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING AND PHYSICAL HEALTH AFFECTED THEIR CAREGIVING

We also asked parents about their emotional well-being and physical health in the first two months after having a baby.

When we asked specifically about experiences of emotional well-being, 50% of postpartum parents said their emotional well-being somewhat interfered with their ability to care for their baby. Fourteen percent said their emotional well-being greatly interfered with their ability to care for their baby.

When we asked specifically about physical health, nearly half (49%) of postpartum parents said their physical health interfered somewhat with their ability to care for their baby. Eight percent said their physical health greatly interfered with their ability to care for their baby.

These findings were consistent across postpartum parents from different racial and ethnic groups and household income levels.

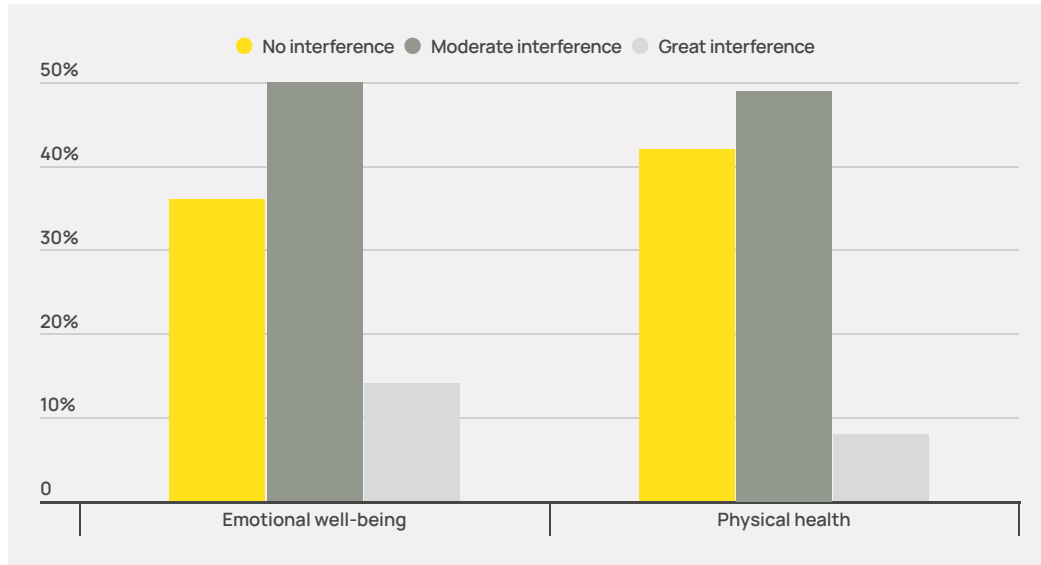
“Lack of sleep when returning to work after three months of maternity leave while still trying to manage three children all together and take care of household responsibilities. I did not have postpartum depression, but have recently been diagnosed with moderate-severe depression due to challenges with managing all responsibilities, lack of sleep, and no opportunity for stress management/ self care.”

Parent in North Carolina

“Having no time for self makes me feel a bit lost and depressed. My baby was breastfed, so I did not feel that I could ever really leave to take a break. I was always nearby and needed. The emotional postpartum journey and roller coaster of emotions was also very difficult. I have two older children at home that I also needed to continue to care for.”

Parent in Pennsylvania

Postpartum parents' experiences taking care of baby, by level of interference



“I was angry a lot due to the lack of help. I would say postpartum depression isn’t just sadness – you can easily get into a funk when overwhelmed and feel no one is helping.”

Parent in Kansas

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Support for parents' emotional well-being and physical health is critical in the postpartum period. Emotional well-being and physical health are essential for providing supportive, responsive caregiving. And research shows that parents' own stress can affect the emotional well-being of their children.

While RAPID data show that many parents are having very positive

experiences bonding with and caring for their new babies, the data also indicate there is more that can be done to ensure postpartum parents are well-connected to resources and support. Paid family leave, improved access to high-quality healthcare, and expanded opportunities to connect to social supports and participate in health-promoting activities are vital to the well-being of postpartum parents and the healthy development of their children.

ABOUT THE RAPID SURVEY PROJECT

RAPID is under the direction of Philip Fisher, PhD, Director of the Center on Early Childhood at Stanford University

Data presented in this fact sheet are based on RAPID household surveys. Analyses are based on responses collected from 1,095 parents between July 2021 and July 2023. These parents represent a range of voices: 7.4% are Black, 11.6% are Latinx, and 29% live at or below 200% of the federal poverty level. Proportions/percentages are calculated based on the item-level response rates, not on the total sample. The data for these analyses are not weighted.

The RAPID project includes a survey of caregivers with children under age 6 and a survey of child care providers and other adults who care for children under age 6.

These surveys are designed to gather essential information continuously regarding the needs, health-promoting behaviors, and well-being of children and their families and important adults in their lives.

RAPID collects data monthly from 1,000 caregivers and child care providers in all 50 states. The surveys are national in scope, though not technically nationally representative. RAPID collects snapshots of data across time and can also assess trends longitudinally.

For more information about RAPID study design and methods, [see here](#).

7,000+

Providers

20,000+

Households

50

US States

