

Dance as a Storytelling Medium: Integrating Cultural Perspectives into Medical Education

Prasida Unni BA¹, Yamini Adusumelli BA¹, Anvitha Sathya BA¹, Nidhi Lal MD PhD^{1,2}



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1. Boston University Chobanian and Avedisian School of Medicine, Boston, MA
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Background

Postpartum Depression (PPD):
Depressive episode in a birth giver within 12 months of childbirth.

- Missed opportunities to diagnose PPD symptoms in patients by healthcare providers.
- Discrepancy between those who screen positive for PPD and those who ultimately seek treatment¹.

PPD in the South Asian Community:

- 2-fold increased risk of PPD in South Asian immigrant women living abroad compared to women living in country of origin².
- Stigma surrounding discussions of PPD³.
- Hesitancy to discuss mental health with providers⁴.

Social and Community Context:

- One of five social determinants of health identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- Proportion of adults who report having social support is below target and declining since 2017⁵.



Narrative-Based Medical Education:

- Improving health equity by bringing awareness to the experiences of those from marginalized communities who have historically been understudied.

Objectives

- Create a culturally-rooted medical education tool exploring South Asian narratives about PPD with the purposes of:
1. Increasing **knowledge about signs/symptoms** of PPD
 2. **Providing resources** for individuals with PPD
 3. Improving provider understanding of the **patient experience**
 4. Conveying the **cultural context of stigma** towards PPD in the South Asian community

Methods

Development of Medical Education Tool:

- Indian classical dance chosen as the medium for exploring PPD narratives, given its historic roots in storytelling and cultural connection to South Asian narratives.

- Dance film content developed by three medical students with Indian classical dance experience, gathering information from:
 - PPD symptoms identified in the literature
 - Collection of South Asian narratives about PPD
 - Evidence-based treatment options



Tool Assessment:

- Dance film presented to medical students at Boston University Chobanian and Avedisian School of Medicine.
- Participants engaged in focus group discussions after viewing the film.
- Participant comments were recorded, transcribed, and coded for emerging themes through NVivo qualitative analysis software.

Results

THEMES	STUDENT PERSPECTIVES	QUOTES
STIGMA/KNOWLEDGE	Societal stigma hinders conversations about PPD. Societal stigma is especially prevalent in immigrant populations . Lack of knowledge and resources further hinders necessary conversations around mental health.	“There is a very strong emphasis in many Asian cultures on conformity, and also the group at large over the individual , which can sometimes lead to, I hesitate to say neglect, but in some cases it can be neglect of what one individual is going through. I think postpartum depression can be a real case of that”
	Healthcare providers and patients (and their support system) will benefit from better access to resources which emphasize the signs as well as the need to engage in care for PPD.	“Besides not feeling validated in your feelings already, which many people probably are feeling, it's very difficult to actually find some resources , or to talk about it, because it can be so taboo to discuss your feelings. ”
NARRATIVE MEDICINE	Emotional connection facilitates learning and creates context for healthcare providers to understand various medical situations. Narrative medicine can identify and depict various translatable social risk factors for patients.	“Dance is a great platform to use, because you're able to have that emotional connection , place yourself in the other person's shoes and see what they're going through.”
	Normalizes taboo medical conditions. Platform for the dissemination of resources for healthcare providers, patients, family, and friends.	“ I wouldn't have even known... before watching this video that postpartum depression was such a big problem in the South Asian community” “it gives you a glimpse into the person behind the illness and helps with patient centered care... It changes the perspective if you see more of the person.”
PROVIDERS' ROLE	The cultural competency of healthcare providers can facilitate patient trust . Integrating cultural context and socioeconomic risk factors into healthcare delivery can help providers better support their patients and pre-emptively identify patients in need of support .	“ broadens your perspective to see the possible triggers and expectations that might be there, and so you're more aware of things to ask for.”
	Cultural context is important to consider because patients can present differently based on what they think is culturally acceptable.	“It's important to understand how stigma surrounding mental health manifests in each culture as much as possible. That will inform the way we treat our patients” “So if you understand the cultural context, you can tailor your treatment to that patient, right? You want to be able to treat the patient, not the disease. ”

Table 1: Key emerging themes from focus group discussions with medical students after watching the postpartum depression dance film, with summaries of student perspectives and corresponding quotes from the discussions.

Conclusions

Impact of Narrative Learning:

- Narrative learning through dance humanizes stigmatized illnesses and encourages necessary dialogue, allowing for a special focus on the unique barriers and needs that at-risk populations may face.

Dance Media as a Medical Education Tool:

- Serves as a platform for the accessible dissemination of resources and knowledge related to PPD.
- Aides with the identification of healthcare providers' roles in identifying postpartum depression.

Participant-identified Barriers to Care:

- Societal stigma, limited knowledge about the signs and symptoms of PPD, and limited access to resources were identified as perceived barriers to engaging in care and conversation.

Learning about Social/Community Context:

- Cultural exposure improves cultural competency.
- Exploring postpartum depression and other topics through narrative medicine improves healthcare providers' cultural sensitivity and encourages the integration of cultural context into healthcare management and delivery.

References

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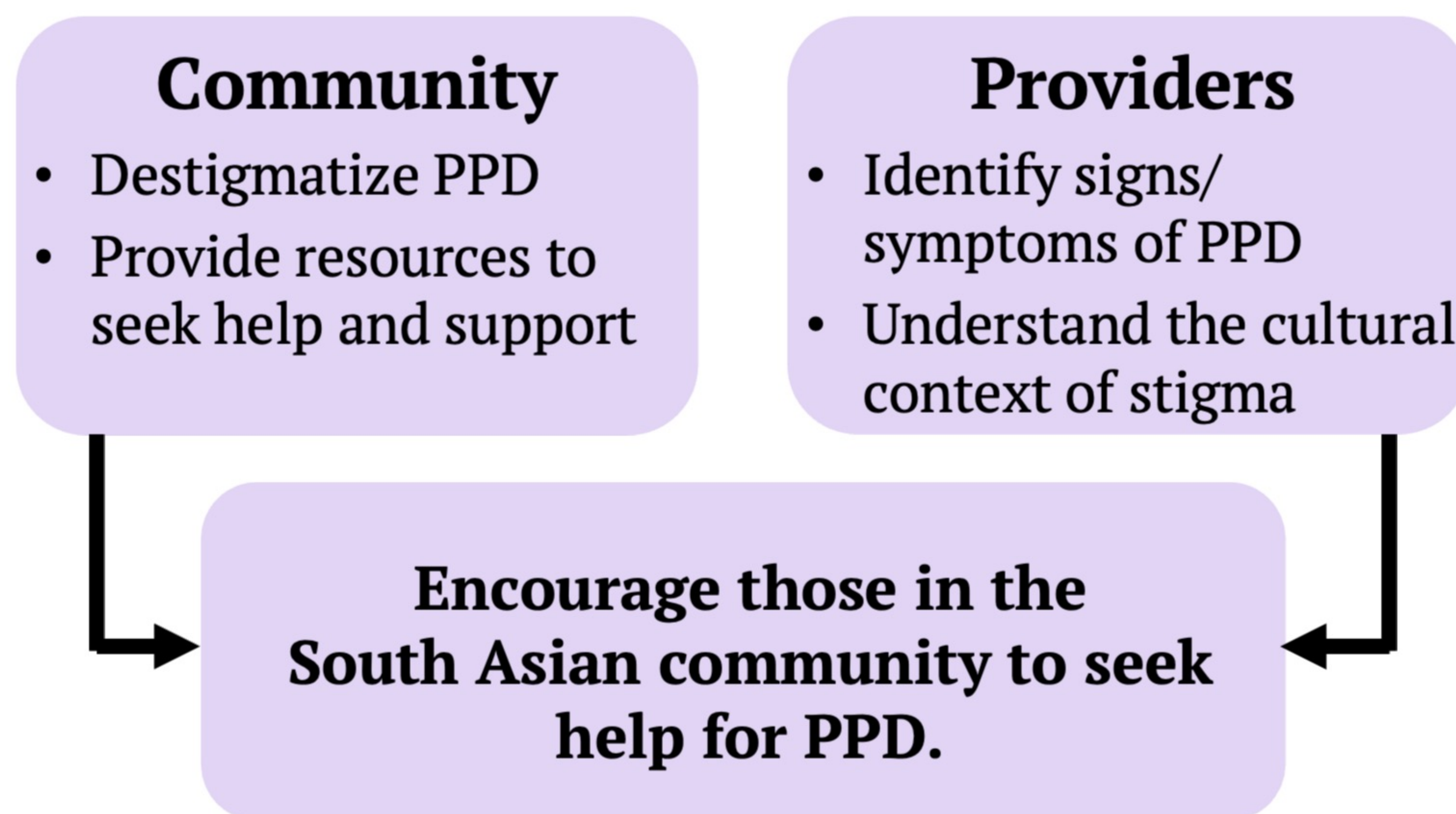
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For helping with the production of our dance film, *Nirbhaya*, we also want to extend a special thanks to Skyler Piltch for videography.

Social and Community Context:

- One of five social determinants of health identified by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- Proportion of adults who report having social support is below target and declining since 2017⁵.



Narrative-Based Medical Education:

- Improving health equity by bringing awareness to the experiences of those from marginalized communities who have historically been understudied.

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THEMES	STUDENT PERSPECTIVES	QUOTES
STIGMA/KNOWLEDGE	Societal stigma hinders conversations about PPD. Societal stigma is especially prevalent in immigrant populations . Lack of knowledge and resources further hinders necessary conversations around mental health.	“There is a very strong emphasis in many Asian cultures on conformity, and also the group at large over the individual , which can sometimes lead to, I hesitate to say neglect, but in some cases it can be neglect of what one individual is going through. I think postpartum depression can be a real case of that” “Besides not feeling validated in your feelings already, which many people probably are feeling, it's very difficult to actually find some resources , or to talk about it, because it can be so taboo to discuss your feelings. ”
	Healthcare providers and patients (and their support system) will benefit from better access to resources which emphasize the signs as well as the need to engage in care for PPD.	
NARRATIVE MEDICINE	Emotional connection facilitates learning and creates context for healthcare providers to understand various medical situations. Narrative medicine can identify and depict various translatable social risk factors for patients. Normalizes taboo medical conditions.	“Dance is a great platform to use, because you're able to have that emotional connection , place yourself in the other person's shoes and see what they're going through.” “ I wouldn't have even known... before watching this video that postpartum depression was such a big problem in the South Asian community” “it gives you a glimpse into the person behind the illness and helps with patient centered care... It changes the perspective if you see more of the person.”
	Platform for the dissemination of resources for healthcare providers, patients, family, and friends.	
PROVIDERS' ROLE	The cultural competency of healthcare providers can facilitate patient trust . Integrating cultural context and socioeconomic risk factors into healthcare delivery can help providers better support their patients and pre-emptively identify patients in need of support .	“ broadens your perspective to see the possible triggers and expectations that might be there, and so you're more aware of things to ask for.” “It's important to understand how stigma surrounding mental health manifests in each culture as much as possible. That will inform the way we treat our patients”
	Cultural context is important to consider because patients can present differently based on what they think is culturally acceptable.	“So if you understand the cultural context, you can tailor your treatment to that patient, right? You want to be able to treat the patient, not the disease. ”

Table 1: Key emerging themes from focus group discussions with medical students after watching the postpartum depression dance film, with summaries of student perspectives and corresponding quotes from the discussions.

Conclusions

Impact of Narrative Learning:

- Narrative learning through dance humanizes stigmatized illnesses and encourages necessary dialogue, allowing for a special focus on the unique barriers and needs that at-risk populations may face.

Dance Media as a Medical Education Tool:

- Serves as a platform for the accessible dissemination of resources and knowledge related to PPD.
- Aides with the identification of healthcare providers' roles in identifying postpartum depression.

Participant-identified Barriers to Care:

- Societal stigma, limited knowledge about the signs and symptoms of PPD, and limited access to resources were identified as perceived barriers to engaging in care and conversation.

Learning about Social/Community Context:

- Cultural exposure improves cultural competency.
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NARRATIVE MEDICINE	<p>Emotional connection facilitates learning and creates context for healthcare providers to understand various medical situations.</p> <p>Narrative medicine can identify and depict various translatable social risk factors for patients.</p> <p>Normalizes taboo medical conditions.</p> <p>Platform for the dissemination of resources for healthcare providers, patients, family, and friends.</p>	<p>“Dance is a great platform to use, because you're able to have that emotional connection, place yourself in the other person's shoes and see what they're going through.”</p> <p>“I wouldn't have even known...before watching this video that postpartum depression was such a big problem in the South Asian community”</p> <p>“it gives you a glimpse into the person behind the illness and helps with patient centered care... It changes the perspective if you see more of the person.”</p>
PROVIDERS' ROLE	<p>The cultural competency of healthcare providers can facilitate patient trust.</p> <p>Integrating cultural context and socioeconomic risk factors into healthcare delivery can help providers better support their patients and pre-emptively identify patients in need of support.</p> <p>Cultural context is important to consider because patients can present differently based on what they think is culturally acceptable.</p>	<p>“broadens your perspective to see the possible triggers and expectations that might be there, and so you're more aware of things to ask for.”</p> <p>“It's important to understand how stigma surrounding mental health manifests in each culture as much as possible. That will inform the way we treat our patients”</p> <p>“So if you understand the cultural context, you can tailor your treatment to that patient, right? You want to be able to treat the patient, not the disease.”</p>

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