

Global News Exposure and Perinatal Anxiety in Pregnant Women: A Cross-Sectional Study

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Abstract:

Objective: This study aimed to investigate the relationship between global news exposure and perinatal anxiety levels among pregnant women.

Methods: This cross-sectional analytical study included 180 pregnant women. Data were collected via an online questionnaire consisting of sociodemographic characteristics, global news consumption habits, and the Perinatal Anxiety Screening Scale (PASS). Correlations were assessed using Spearman analysis, and independent predictors were evaluated with multivariate linear regression.

Results: A total of 169 participants were included in the final analysis. The mean PASS score was 34.2±15.8. Significant positive correlations were found between anxiety levels and daily news checking frequency ($r=0.172$, $P=0.025$), fear of missing news ($r=0.154$, $P=0.046$), repetitive checking behavior ($r=0.262$, $P<0.001$), post-exposure tension ($r=0.236$, $P=0.002$), and perceived impact of negative news on pregnancy ($r=0.343$, $P<0.001$). In multivariate analysis, repetitive checking behavior and perceived negative impact remained independent predictors.

Conclusion: Global news exposure is significantly associated with perinatal anxiety. This relationship appears to be driven more by behavioral and cognitive responses to news rather than exposure duration.

Keywords: Global News, Perinatal Anxiety, Media Exposure, Doomscrolling, Mental Health

In recent years, the rapid expansion of social media has significantly transformed the way individuals access information. Through online news platforms and social media channels, individuals are continuously exposed to global news throughout the day. This phenomenon, often referred to as “continuous media exposure,” has emerged as a significant psychosocial determinant in modern societies [1, 2]. Today, individuals are not only exposed to local events but also to global crises such

as wars, natural disasters, economic instability, and pandemics, all of which carry substantial psychological burden.

This transformation extends beyond the mere increase in information flow; it also involves a fundamental shift in how information is selected and presented. Digital media platforms no longer operate on a neutral or chronological basis; instead, they rely on algorithm-driven systems designed to maximize user engagement. As a result, content characterized by

Submitted: April 8, 2026 Accepted: May 13, 2026 Published Online: May 16, 2026

How to cite this article: Güngör S, Gürcan MB, Kanbak AR. Global News Exposure and Perinatal Anxiety in Pregnant Women: A Cross-Sectional Study. Eur Res J. 2026. doi: 10.18621/eurj.1285

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threat, crisis, and uncertainty tends to gain greater visibility, potentially amplifying individuals' perceived risk. This selective visibility structure, often discussed within the framework of "filter bubbles" and "algorithmic curation," may narrow individuals' perception of reality and increase exposure to emotionally charged content [3, 4].

The psychological effects of media exposure become particularly pronounced following traumatic events. Research conducted after the September 11 attacks demonstrated that increased media exposure was associated with symptoms of post-traumatic stress [2]. Similarly, studies conducted during natural disasters and infectious disease outbreaks have reported significant associations between media exposure and heightened levels of anxiety and distress [1, 5].

The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the relationship between media exposure and mental health. Numerous studies have shown that increased consumption of social media and news during the pandemic was associated with elevated levels of anxiety, depression, and psychological distress [6–8]. Additionally, the phenomenon of "infodemic," characterized by excessive information and the rapid spread of misinformation, has contributed to increased psychological burden [9, 10].

Importantly, the psychological impact of media exposure is not solely determined by the amount of content consumed but also by how individuals perceive and process this information. Cognitive-behavioral models suggest that selective attention to threat-related information and negative cognitive biases play a central role in the development of anxiety [11]. Within this framework, behaviors such as compulsive news checking and "doomscrolling"—the repetitive consumption of negative news content—have gained increasing attention [12].

However, these cognitive processes cannot be understood solely as internal mechanisms; they are also shaped by the broader media environment. The continuous flow of information, notification systems, and mechanisms that foster fear of missing out (FOMO) create an external context that reinforces repetitive checking behaviors. In this sense, media exposure should be conceptualized not only as content consumption but also as a practice that produces and sustains specific behavioral patterns. This perspective aligns with contemporary research suggesting that

anxiety emerges through a dynamic interaction between individual cognition and the digital environment [1, 12].

Pregnancy represents a unique period characterized by significant physiological changes and increased psychological vulnerability. During this time, women may experience heightened anxiety due to concerns about fetal health, childbirth, and future maternal roles [13]. The prevalence of perinatal anxiety has been reported to range between 15% and 25% [14, 15]. Furthermore, perinatal anxiety has been associated with adverse outcomes such as preterm birth, low birth weight, and postpartum depression [16].

Studies conducted during the pandemic have demonstrated that increased stress and media exposure significantly elevate anxiety levels among pregnant women [17, 18]. However, research specifically examining the relationship between global news exposure and anxiety in pregnant populations remains limited.

The Perinatal Anxiety Screening Scale (PASS) is a validated instrument designed to assess anxiety symptoms specific to the perinatal period [19]. In this context, understanding the impact of global news exposure on anxiety during pregnancy is essential for identifying modifiable risk factors and developing preventive strategies. In addition to individual-level psychological interventions, integrating digital literacy and controlled media consumption strategies into clinical practice may play a crucial role in improving maternal mental health outcomes.

METHODS

This cross-sectional descriptive-analytical observational study was conducted among pregnant women aged between 18 and 45 years. Participants were recruited over a 3-month period between January 2026 and March 2026. The study population consisted of pregnant women with singleton pregnancies who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. The online questionnaire was distributed and announced through various social media and digital communication platforms, including pregnancy-related social networks and messaging applications. Women with severe psychiatric disorders, those receiving active psychiatric treatment, and those with

diagnosed major fetal anomalies were excluded from the study.

Data were collected electronically using Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of three main sections: (1) sociodemographic and obstetric characteristics, (2) global news consumption habits and media exposure behaviors, and (3) the Perinatal Anxiety Screening Scale (PASS). The PASS is a validated screening instrument specifically developed for assessing anxiety symptoms during the perinatal period and consists of 31 items scored on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0 to 3 [19]. Higher scores indicate higher levels of perinatal anxiety.

This study was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee of Izmir Bakırçay University (Approval No: 2900, Date: 01.04.2026). Informed consent was obtained electronically from all participants prior to completing the online questionnaire.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 26.0 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA). Descriptive data were presented as mean \pm standard deviation or number and percentage, as appropriate. The relationships between media exposure variables and PASS scores were evaluated using Spearman correlation analysis. Multivariate linear regression analysis was subsequently conducted to identify independent predictors of perinatal anxiety. A P-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

RESULTS

A total of 180 pregnant women were initially enrolled in the study; however, due to missing data, 169 participants were included in the final analysis. The mean age of the participants was 29.8 ± 5.4 years. More than half of the participants had a university-level education (55.1%), and 42.2% were employed. Approximately half of the sample consisted of primigravid women (46.5%), and the majority reported that their pregnancy was planned (76.8%). The mean gestational age was 24.3 ± 8.1 weeks. The mean PASS score was calculated as 34.2 ± 15.8 .

TABLE 1. Sociodemographic, Obstetric Characteristics and PASS Scores of the Participants

Variable	Data
Age (years)	29.8 \pm 5.4
Age group	
18–24	32 (18.9%)
25–29	48 (28.4%)
30–34	52 (30.8%)
35–39	27 (16.0%)
\geq 40	10 (5.9%)
Education level	
Primary school	18 (10.7%)
Secondary school	26 (15.4%)
High school	23 (13.6%)
University	74 (43.8%)
Postgraduate	28 (16.6%)
Employment status	
Unemployed	98 (57.8%)
Employed	71 (42.2%)
Income level	
Low	28 (16.6%)
Middle	100 (59.2%)
High	41 (24.3%)
Gestational age (weeks)	24.3 \pm 8.1
Gestational age group	
1–12 weeks	36 (21.3%)
13–24 weeks	54 (32.0%)
25–36 weeks	60 (35.5%)
\geq 37 weeks	19 (11.2%)
Gravidity	
1	79 (46.7%)
2	51 (30.2%)
3	23 (13.6%)
\geq 4	16 (9.5%)
History of miscarriage	
No	131 (77.5%)
Yes	38 (22.5%)
Planned pregnancy	
Yes	130 (76.9%)
No	39 (23.1%)
Chronic disease	
No	142 (84.0%)
Yes	27 (16.0%)
Psychiatric history	
No	150 (88.8%)
Yes	19 (11.2%)
Total PASS score	34.2 \pm 15.8
PASS categories	
Low (<21)	37 (21.9%)
Moderate (21–41)	82 (48.5%)
High (\geq 42)	50 (29.6%)

Data are shown as mean \pm standard deviation or n (%) where appropriate. PASS, perinatal anxiety screening scale.

TABLE 2. Association Between News Consumption Variables and PASS Scores

Variable	r	P-value
Frequency of news follow-up	0.099	0.191
Daily news exposure duration	0.132	0.090
Daily news checking frequency	0.172	0.025
News source	-	0.662

PASS, perinatal anxiety screening scale.

Statistically significant P-value is shown in bold.

Detailed sociodemographic and obstetric characteristics, along with PASS score distribution, are presented in Table 1.

Analysis of global news consumption variables revealed that several behavioral factors were significantly associated with perinatal anxiety. A weak but statistically significant positive correlation was observed between the frequency of daily news checking and PASS scores ($r=0.172$, $P=0.025$). Similarly, fear of missing news was significantly associated with higher anxiety levels ($r=0.154$, $P=0.046$).

Repetitive news-checking behavior demonstrated a stronger association with PASS scores, indicating a moderate positive correlation with anxiety levels ($r=0.262$, $P<0.001$). Additionally, feelings of tension following news exposure were significantly correlated with increased anxiety ($r=0.236$, $P=0.002$).

The strongest association was found between perceived negative impact of news on pregnancy and PASS scores ($r=0.343$, $P<0.001$). In contrast, quantitative measures such as general frequency of news consumption and total daily exposure duration were not significantly associated with anxiety levels ($P>0.05$). These findings are summarized in Table 2.

Multivariate linear regression analysis identified

TABLE 3. Multivariate Linear Regression Analysis

Variable	B	P-value
Repetitive news checking behavior	1.95	<0.001
Perceived negative impact of news	2.44	<0.001
Post-exposure tension	1.21	0.006

Statistically significant P-values are shown in bold.

repetitive news-checking behavior ($B=1.95$, $P<0.001$), perceived negative impact of news ($B=2.44$, $P<0.001$), and post-exposure tension ($B=1.21$, $P=0.006$) as independent predictors of perinatal anxiety. The model demonstrated moderate explanatory power ($R^2=0.24$), indicating that approximately one-quarter of the variance in anxiety scores could be explained by these variables. Detailed regression results are presented in Table 3.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationship between global news exposure and perinatal anxiety among pregnant women, demonstrating that behavioral and cognitive factors are more strongly associated with anxiety than the mere extent of media exposure. Our findings suggest that the psychological responses individuals develop toward media content play a more critical role than the duration of exposure itself.

Notably, repetitive news-checking behavior emerged as one of the strongest predictors of anxiety. This finding is consistent with the growing body of literature addressing compulsive information-seeking behaviors and the phenomenon of “doomscrolling.” Doomscrolling refers to the excessive and repetitive consumption of negative or threat-related news content. While this behavior may initially arise as an attempt to regain a sense of control in the face of uncertainty, it paradoxically contributes to increased stress and anxiety levels. Continuous exposure to negative information reinforces threat perception and promotes sustained attention toward adverse stimuli, ultimately intensifying anxiety symptoms. This effect may be particularly pronounced during pregnancy, a period characterized by heightened psychological vulnerability [1, 12].

Furthermore, our findings suggest that repetitive news-checking behavior should not be interpreted solely as an individual coping mechanism but also as a practice reinforced by the structural characteristics of the digital media environment. The continuous flow of information, combined with algorithm-driven content prioritization, tends to amplify crisis-related news and maintain a persistent sense of informational incompleteness. This dynamic encourages repetitive checking cycles and sustains engagement with

negative content. From this perspective, doomscrolling can be understood not only as a cognitive bias but also as a behavior shaped by the broader digital media ecosystem [4].

Consistent with previous studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, increased media consumption and frequent news exposure were associated with higher levels of anxiety [6–8]. Additionally, the widespread dissemination of misinformation and information overload on social media platforms has been shown to exacerbate psychological distress [9].

Recent literature published after the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic has further strengthened the evidence linking problematic digital media exposure with adverse psychological outcomes during pregnancy. Samra *et al.* demonstrated that problematic social media use among pregnant women was significantly associated with elevated levels of psychological distress, anxiety symptoms, and impaired emotional well-being, suggesting that excessive engagement with digital content may function as a chronic stressor during pregnancy [20]. Similarly, the large-scale meta-analysis conducted by Caffieri *et al.* [21] reported persistently high global prevalence rates of perinatal anxiety and depression even in the post-pandemic period, emphasizing the ongoing vulnerability of pregnant women to psychologically distressing information environments. Emerging evidence has also suggested that maternal psychological distress during pregnancy may extend beyond maternal outcomes alone. Weiner *et al.* [22] reported associations between prenatal psychological distress and alterations in neonatal brain development, highlighting the potential long-term neurodevelopmental implications of sustained maternal stress exposure. In addition, Waring *et al.* [23] emphasized that digital psychoeducational and mental health-related online content has become increasingly integrated into perinatal care experiences, further increasing pregnant women's exposure to emotionally charged health information. Likewise, Huddleston *et al.* [24] demonstrated that the use of social media platforms for obtaining medical and pregnancy-related information was independently associated with increased prenatal anxiety symptoms. Collectively, these findings support the notion that digital media exposure has evolved into an important

psychosocial determinant of maternal mental health and reinforce the importance of evaluating not only the quantity but also the psychological processing of media content during pregnancy.

The strong association observed between perceived negative impact of news on pregnancy and anxiety levels can be explained within the framework of cognitive threat appraisal. Threat-related information tends to attract greater attention and is processed more deeply, thereby intensifying emotional responses [11]. Moreover, the emotional intensity of media content—often enhanced through dramatization, visual elements, and narrative framing—may further amplify its psychological impact. This aligns with the concept of “affective publics,” whereby media not only disseminates information but also circulates collective emotional states such as fear and anxiety [25]. In the context of pregnancy, such emotionally charged content may be more readily internalized, contributing to elevated anxiety levels.

Research on the psychological impact of media exposure has shown that post-traumatic media consumption is associated with adverse mental health outcomes [2, 5]. These findings indicate that psychological distress mediated through media exposure can emerge even among individuals without direct exposure to the event.

Another notable finding of this study is the lack of a significant relationship between quantitative measures of media exposure (e.g., duration and frequency) and anxiety. This suggests that subjective interpretation and cognitive processing of media content may be more influential than exposure itself. This observation is consistent with theoretical models emphasizing the role of individual perception and cognitive engagement in shaping media effects [26].

Identifying modifiable risk factors for anxiety during pregnancy is of considerable clinical importance, given that perinatal anxiety has been associated with adverse maternal and neonatal outcomes [16]. Therefore, understanding how media consumption behaviors influence anxiety may inform preventive strategies.

Strengths and Limitations

The study possesses several important strengths.

It addresses a relatively underexplored and increasingly relevant topic in maternal mental health, particularly in the context of growing global media exposure and widespread access to digital news platforms. The use of a validated measurement tool enhanced the reliability and scientific rigor of the assessment of perinatal anxiety. Furthermore, the inclusion of an adequate sample size increased the statistical power of the study and supported the robustness of the findings. By highlighting the potential relationship between media exposure and maternal psychological well-being, this study may contribute to raising awareness among healthcare professionals and provide a basis for future longitudinal and multicenter research in this field.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish temporal or causal relationships between global news exposure and perinatal anxiety. Therefore, it cannot be determined whether increased exposure to global news leads to higher anxiety levels or whether individuals with greater anxiety are more likely to seek news-related content. Second, the study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to recall bias, reporting bias, and individual differences in perception and interpretation of questionnaire items. Additionally, participants' media consumption habits and psychological responses may have been influenced by unmeasured confounding variables such as prior psychiatric history, personality traits, social support, or concurrent stressful life events. The study population was also limited to a specific setting, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to broader or culturally diverse populations.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of this study indicate that global news exposure is significantly associated with perinatal anxiety, particularly through behavioral and cognitive responses rather than exposure duration alone. These results highlight the importance of considering not only the quantity of information consumed but also individuals' reactions to such information. Increasing awareness regarding media consumption habits and providing guidance on

limiting compulsive news-checking behaviors may help reduce anxiety levels during pregnancy. Future prospective studies are needed to clarify causal relationships and to develop effective intervention strategies.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

This study was approved by the İzmir Bakırçay University Non-Interventional Clinical Research Ethics Committee. (Decision No: 2900; date: 01.04.2026). All procedures were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments. Informed consent was obtained electronically from all participants prior to completing the online questionnaire.

Data Availability

All data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this published article. The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author, upon reasonable request.

Authors' Contribution

Study Conception: ARK; Study Design: ARK; Supervision: SG, MBG; Funding: ARK; Materials: MBG, ARK; Data Collection and/or Processing: MBG, ARK; Statistical Analysis and/or Data Interpretation: SG; Literature Review: SG; Manuscript Preparation: ARK, SG, MBG; and Critical Review: SG.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) disclosed no conflict of interest during the preparation or publication of this manuscript.

Financing

The author(s) disclosed that they did not receive any grant during the conduction or writing of this study.

Acknowledgments

The authors have no acknowledgments to declare.

Generative Artificial Intelligence Statement

AI-assisted language editing tools were used to

improve clarity and academic writing. The all content of the study was produced by the author(s) in accordance with scientific research methods and academic ethical principles.

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