

How colic is shattering the dream of new motherhood

Motherhood. The journey through colic is a walk through a fire that others cannot always see. It tests the limits of love, patience, and sanity...**P.14**

DRIVING

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How colic is shattering the dream of new motherhood



The journey through colic is a walk through a fire that others cannot always see. It tests the limits of love, patience, and sanity. It is the rude disillusionment to the motherhood glow.

BY KASSIM HABIBA

The vision is universal, sold to us in pastel hues of the serene mother, the peacefully cooing newborn, a bubble of blissful, if tired, connection. Veronica Atim dreamed that dream, too. But two years ago, in the raw, quiet hours of the night, it shattered. Her baby's cries were not the gentle whimpers of hunger or the fussing of a wet diaper; they were a relentless, piercing siren that nothing could silence.

Walks around the compound under a starlit sky, hushed lullabies, endless rocking, all were useless against the storm. What should have been a time of delightful discovery became a draining battle of attrition. "I was prepared for sleepless nights," she confesses, her voice still carrying the echo of that exhaustion. "I was not prepared for this."

Veronica was not alone. She was in the company of a silent, weary army of mothers navigating the enigmatic and emotionally devastating terrain of infant colic. A 2020 study published in the *Journal of Pediatric Nursing* found that a staggering 67 percent of infants experience colic. Yet, despite its

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prevalence, it remains one of the most misunderstood conditions, often dismissed as "just a phase" while it systematically unravels the mental health and confidence of those who care for the child. This is not just a story about crying babies. It is a story about how that crying can break the mothers, too.

Parents with colicky babies, confess that they cannot find any joy in their new roles as mothers because every day is a struggle. This profound chasm between expectation and reality, is a recurring theme.

For another mother, who underwent the physically and emotionally arduous journey of IVF to conceive, the diagnosis of colic felt like a cruel joke.

"I will surely end up in a mental asylum," she confessed, adding that the experience made her years-long fight for motherhood feel "like the worst mistake of my life."

What is colic?

Dr Sabrina Kitaka's most crucial advice is not for the baby, but for the mother.

"Stress the significance of parental calm," she insists. Her prescription is a lifeline for fraying nerves: deep breathing, placing the baby safely in their crib, and stepping into another room for fifteen minutes of silence.

"Listen to music, ask friends or family for relief, go for a walk outside." This is not abandonment;

WHAT IS COLIC?

Dr Sabrina Kitaka, a senior lecturer and paediatrician at Makerere University College of Health Sciences, offers the clinical perspective.

"Colic sounds like a disease, but it is simply the name for excessive crying during the baby's first few months," she explains, typically characterised by signs of gas and lasting until three to nine months of age. The official marker? Crying for more than three hours a day, for more than three days a week, for at least three weeks.

But these sterile criteria do little to capture the visceral reality of that three-hour window, the sound that vibrates in your bones, and the helplessness that curdles into panic.

it is a necessary tactical retreat for survival.

Disconnection

Yet, the ability to self-regulate is often the first casualty. Evelyn C. Kharono Lufafa, a counselling psychologist at Makerere University, identifies "trouble bonding with the colicky baby" as a major red flag. "Feeling disconnected or uncertain about

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caring for the baby," she notes, is a sign that a mother is experiencing more than typical newborn hardship. This disconnection is often compounded by intense anxiety and a withdrawal from social circles, fueled by overwhelming shame. "Why can't I soothe my own child?" becomes a torturous, looping refrain.

This shame, Kharono explains, is frequently amplified by deep-seated cultural beliefs. In many communities, colic is not seen as a common physiological issue but is attributed to spiritual causes.

"Mothers may feel responsible for their baby's condition," she says. This internalised blame, a belief that she has somehow sinned or been cursed, can be paralyzing. It not only deepens her isolation but can also delay seeking medical help, as families may prioritise spiritual or traditional remedies first.

The result is a perfect storm, a physically exhausting, culturally fraught, and profoundly lonely experience where a mother's own wellbeing is forced to take a backseat. Colic may be a temporary tribulation in the pediatric timeline, but for the maternal psyche, its scars can be permanent. It becomes a frequent reminder of perceived failure, a worm of regret that threatens to reshape the entire narrative of parenthood into

something negative and fearful.

Change

But the narrative can be changed. It begins, as Kharono advocates, with community-wide education and the creation of safe, non-judgmental spaces for mothers to voice their despair. It requires reframing colic not as a mother's shortcoming, but as a shared challenge that demands a support system.

Partners, family, and friends must be mobilised not just to hold the baby, but to hold the mother, to validate her feelings, to take shifts, to tell her she is not a bad parent, she is a resilient one in an incredibly difficult situation.

The journey through colic is a walk through a fire that others cannot always see. It tests the limits of love, patience, and sanity. For Veronica and the countless mothers like her, the path forward is not about finding a magic cure for the crying, but about building a fortress of support around themselves.

It is about understanding that saving your own sanity is not selfish, it is the most essential step in caring for your child. The phase will pass, but a mother's spirit must be protected so she can emerge on the other side, not broken, but forged into a different, stronger version of the mother she always hoped to be.

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