



2022 survey highlights

In March-April 2022, the Pelvic Partnership launched an online survey exploring women's experiences of pregnancy-related pelvic girdle pain (PGP) within the last two years. We had over 350 responses in four weeks, with many women sharing stories of limited access to support and treatment, especially in the early stages of the pandemic.

The findings of this survey are summarised below and will shape the Pelvic Partnership's policy and advocacy efforts over the coming 12 months. We have also included quotes from the survey, highlighted in blue.

Women and their pain

We first asked the survey respondents if they were currently experiencing PGP, and if so, how long since the pain had started:

- **67.5% were currently experiencing PGP**
- **Of those, more than 50% had been in pain for more than 6 months**

This reinforces our anecdotal evidence from engaging with women with PGP, that most women reach out to us when they have been experiencing PGP for more than three months.

"I had a baby in 2020 I was offered a physio appointment, they literally just offered advice of not using stairs and lifting properly. I was in immense pain!! I'm currently pregnant again and I am struggling to walk (I could cry) I will tell my midwife at my next appointment but I don't feel confident I'll get any relief or help. I'm sad because I'm struggling with my nearly two year old and just feel such a let down."

From our ongoing engagement with women with PGP, we know that PGP can affect different women in very different ways. To get an idea of the extent to which women's lives have been affected by their pain, we asked them to quantify their pain levels by asking how mobile they are. In response:

- **Only 6% of survey respondents can walk normally without any pain**
- **80% of survey respondents can walk with pain**
- **13% need to use mobility aids such as crutches or a wheelchair.**
- **2% of survey respondents reported being bedbound**



PGP and healthcare practitioners

A key indicator of access to treatment, support and pain relief for women with PGP is how supported they feel in early appointments with healthcare practitioners, especially their GP and their midwife.

Unfortunately, we found:

- **Only 17% responded that they did feel supported by their GP or midwife**
- **44% did not feel supported by their GP or midwife**
- **37% had mixed feelings about the support offered by their GP or midwife**

“I was ignored and offered nothing, the midwife’s response to me saying I was in pain was “what do you expect, you’re pregnant”. Luckily I found this incredible charity, found an approved manual therapy and she treated me but at a cost.”

“My PGP was dismissed by the consultant and midwife who told me it was very common and I could just buy crutches if I wanted to... I was also repeatedly told I had to remain mobile to avoid blood clots. But no help was given for the PGP.”

“I was not offered any treatment on the NHS and was told it was just a part of pregnancy that will get worse as the pregnancy progresses.”

“Midwife dismissive. Got seen at 33 weeks pregnant by GP. Was told to wait until 6 months postpartum until they would reassess need for referrals.”

Access to NHS manual therapy

Since March 2020, women have reported to us that it is even harder to be seen face-to-face on the NHS, and then may not be given individualised treatment including manual therapy. In the survey, we defined manual therapy and asked our respondents if they had been offered manual therapy on the NHS:

- **80% of survey respondents had not been offered manual therapy on the NHS**

Instead women were either offered either nothing or a range of alternative treatments, including:

- Individual in-person appointment with exercises and advice
- Telephone or video appointments with exercises and advice
- Group class with exercises and advice
- Lost referrals for NHS physiotherapy services
- Nothing offered
- Given a support band or crutches

There were mixed responses when asked if they were confident these different approaches had improved their condition.



“I was told the waiting list was too long and by the time I got an appointment I’d have had my baby.”

“I was referred to physio after PGP in first pregnancy but never heard anything so paid for private sessions myself.”

“I started with PGP during lockdown. Midwife gave me a sheet of paper with some exercises on it. They said no one would see me due to lockdown. After it eased off I was given a physio appointment but they gave me exercises which I couldn’t even do without being in severe pain.”

“I experienced bad PGP with both pregnancies, and it was bad from an early stage with the second. Not offered any treatment, told to buy a support band and research treatments online.”

“During pregnancy midwife referred me on to non specialist physio at GP. We had a phone chat and she emailed some exercises which didn’t help. During my pregnancy I got to the point where I was more or less housebound and we had to hire a wheelchair when we went out.”

Access to private manual therapy

For a broader picture of access to manual therapy, we also asked the same question for manual therapy from private practitioners, including physiotherapists, osteopaths and chiropractors:

- **59% of survey respondents had had private manual therapy**
- **Of those, 82% were either very confident or fairly confident that it had improved their condition**

While many women who reach out to us to utilise private practitioners for hands-on treatment, issues around affordability have been raised to us many times, with treatments costing around £60-80 a session. With this in mind, we asked what reasons survey respondents had for not having private manual therapy:

- **76% of survey respondents said it was because they couldn’t afford the cost of private manual therapy**
- **14% said they couldn’t find a suitable practitioner**
- **8% said it was because they had had effective manual therapy on the NHS**

For those survey respondents who had had private manual therapy, we asked how they had found their practitioner:

- **36% used the Pelvic Partnership list of recommended practitioners**
- **32% followed a recommendation from a friend or family member**
- **32% did an internet search**



“I have had to pay privately for chiro, physio and massage to help with the pain. Still not fully resolved. This started with my first pregnancy 5 years ago. Impacting my life with children, unable to sit on the floor or too long playing, standing at parks is a big no.”

Mental health problems and PGP

In previous surveys we have asked women about any mental health problems during and after pregnancy and if these were associated with their experience of PGP. The results in 2022 were similar to previous surveys, with:

- **63% of survey respondents experienced a problem with their mental health during or after pregnancy**
- **When asked what factors affected their mental health and wellbeing, 72% listed PGP as a factor in their mental health problems**

“I have never felt so lonely or lost.”

For further details about the survey, please contact our co-ordinator on contact@pelvicpartnership.org.uk.