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Student Midwives use of Stereotypes in Perinatal Mental Health Care

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Background

Perinatal mental health problems (PMHP) are common and are a major cause of morbidity and mortality among childbearing women¹. Despite the known adverse effects, many women go undetected and untreated because of their failure to disclose symptoms. Reasons for lack of disclosure are complex but are often due to the stereotypical attitudes and discriminating behaviour of health professionals².

Aim

The aim of the project is to investigate the role of stereotypical attitudes in women's disclosure of perinatal mental health problems and their access to care.

Research Governance

Approval to conduct the study was obtained from Middlesex University Ethics Committee.

Method

This is a two phase study using a descriptive qualitative research design.

Phase One: Four focus group interviews with final year student midwives attending a UK Institute of Higher Education.

Phase Two: Semi-structured interviews with women who have experienced mild to moderate PMHP.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to code and categorize the data.

Early Findings

This poster reports on Phase One of the study*

A Preliminary analysis of one focus group interview suggests a lack of awareness among student midwives about the care of women with PMHP. Student midwives believe their involvement is with the care of "normal" women only, women with PMHP were the remit of the mental health team.

"...we deal with normality. Serious mental health problems are not my background...."

Students believed they did not have enough knowledge or time to care for women with PMHP.

"... mental health would not be our thing...I have not got the knowledge...."

Students had a concern for issues concerning safety and for "referring on" women with PMHP.

"... the midwife's role will be again back to safety...."

Preliminary analysis would suggest student midwives categorise and stereotype women with PMHP.

"...you have to be careful with these people; we don't know how she is going to react..."

Conclusion

Preliminary analysis of one focus group suggests student midwives are unconfident in caring for women with PMHP and perceive a lack of training and time. Student midwives attitudes and reference to women with PMHP might suggest use of stereotypes, however, further data collection and analysis is needed before any conclusions or recommendations for practice can be made.

REFERENCES

¹ O'Keane, V.M. and Marsh, S. (2007), Pregnancy plus: depression during pregnancy, *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 334, May, pp. 1003-5.

² Byatt, N., Biebel, K., Friedman, L., Debordes-Jackson, G., Zeidonis, D. and Pbert, L. (2013), Patient's views on depression care in obstetric settings: how do they compare to the views of perinatal health care", *General Hospital Psychiatry*, Vol. 35 No. 6, pp. 598-604.

*Based on findings from one Focus Group