

The Availability of Social Support or Services for Mothers Following Birth

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to inquire about a mother's perspective on their experiences regarding the availability of social support or services received shortly after delivering their child. Instant changes in mood swings, loss of sleep, burdensome feelings and foremost the occurrence of depressive symptoms are some of the challenges a mother faces in the postpartum period. Using a qualitative research method, the principal investigator interviewed five mothers' in the Region of Peel that has given birth in the past year to gain an understanding of their recent experiences. One-on-one interviews were carried out so that mothers' share their insights in a comfortable and supportive environment. The interview protocol answers the research question, "what are mother's perspectives on the availability of social support/services they received after the birth of their child?". Five themes emerged from findings of the study: difficulties in pregnancy, personal support vs public support, security and positivity, online assistance or networking and importance of a partners role. Findings from this study advise that personal vs public support and security and positivity hold a greater significance to all mothers'. It also emphasizes the difficulties faced in pregnancy such as body awareness and health complications.

Introduction

A mother's primary focus is to ensure their child's safety and offering them an environment that is filled with nurture, care and love. Some mothers' handle birth and raising a child fairly well and are filled with happiness, others may struggle with the experience shortly after childbirth that may affect "the early mother-infant relationship and impact the infant's future health" (Kristensen, Simonsen & Trillinggaard, 2018, p. 1). Mothers' must be well-protected during this sensitive period because they may face challenging or depressive symptoms such as changes in mood swings, loss of sleep, overwhelmed feelings and mostly feeling depressed. Literature indicates a lack of voice regarding a mother's knowledge and understanding of their experiences. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study is to learn about mothers' perspectives on their experiences regarding the availability of social support/services offered after childbirth. To collect further data, the study will be led by the following sub-question: how was your experience during and after pregnancy?

Literature Review

As the research question was changed during the phase of Methodology, two out of three themes has significance towards the final research question.

The lack of social support/service as social support decreases levels of PPD

The need for social support for any mother is essential as social interactions are necessary for everyone's development. First, literature found that social support minimizes levels of postpartum depression. "Studies have indicated that mothers who received social support during pregnancy and/or after childbirth were significantly less likely to experience PPD". (Kim, Connolly & Tamim, 2014, p. 2). Second, experiences of teen mothers are also troublesome as they have difficulties due to lack of experience in life generally, financial stability, education on hold and unplanned pregnancy can negatively impact teen mothers'. "Studies have shown that PPD affects as much as 26% among teen mother's in comparison to 13% among the general population" (Kim, Connolly & Tamim, 2014, p. 7). Finally, consequences for immigrant mothers as they research found that they are at a higher risk of developing PPD due to "Immigration stress and lack of access to health care services were found among immigrant women". (Alhasanat & Fry-McComish, 2015, p. 1). With many stressors, poor mental health stability and lack of self-care lead to complications, which is why this study emphasizes the need for continuous support for all mothers'.

Early Intervention Minimizes Risks of PPD

Social support is pivotal for all mothers' during and after pregnancy and the theme of early intervention minimizes risks of PPD has had connections to a couple of participants who were continuously supported during and after pregnancy by their midwives. "midwives practicing at their full clinical capacity, without physician oversight or supervision, may support greater access to midwifery care". (Attanasio, Alarid-Escudera & Kozhimannil, 2020, p. 63). Mothers' with fewer chances of physical complications could benefit from having a mid-wife so that their pregnancies transition positively with extended support. "Midwife-led care for low-risk women compared with physician-led care appears to improve a range of maternal outcomes, to reduce the number of procedures in labour, and increase satisfaction with care". (Sutcliffe, Caird & Kavanagh, 2012, p. 2384). The presence of a mid-wife also assists towards preventions of PPD as they continuously support mothers' in their pregnancies providing educational information, guidance, resources and most importantly monthly or weekly one-on-one meetings/conversations.

Methodology

Research Design

A qualitative research design was used so that the principal investigator and the participants engage in conversations that is supportive and convenient for all participants. One-on-one interviews were conducted with all five participants.

Instrument

- Twelve one-on-one interview questions
- Appendix D: Interview protocol
- Duration: Thirty minutes

Procedure

- All five participants were recruited in the Region of Peel and each was provided with an Informed Consent Letter (Appendix C) and Sound Recording Consent form (Appendix B).
- Once the participants were familiar with each aspect of the study, a date, time and location was agreed upon
- All important information was recited before each interview to participants for clarification. With their approval, all interviews were recorded using a portable recording device.
- Five interviews were transcribed using Microsoft Word software after which all recordings were permanently deleted. Member checking was conducted once each transcribed interviews were reviewed by the principal investigator.
- Followed by member checking, data was re-organized and analyzed by hand to begin the coding process. During this, the principal investigator also participated in researcher triangulation
- Coding was completed in three steps to ensure all data collected supports the five themes emerging from research, elimination of research bias, validity and overall accuracy of the study

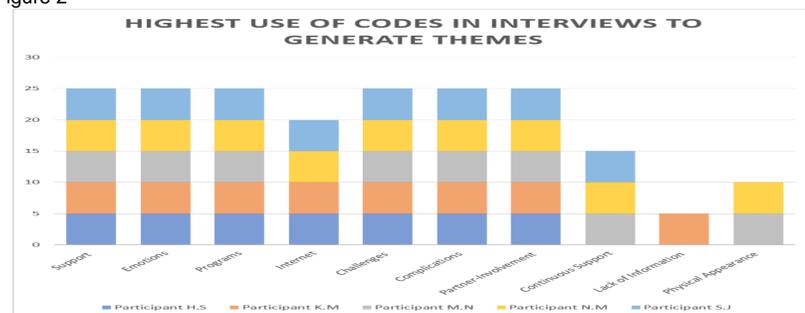
Participants

Participants included first-time or second-time mothers who've recently given birth in the past year, the age range of these mothers is between eighteen years of age or older. A younger age group was chosen to understand the study from two age perspectives. Their experiences are "particularly worrisome among adolescents due to their increased risk of adverse birth outcomes and parenting difficulties relative to non-adolescents adults. (Nunes & Phipps, 2013, p. 1071). Five participants were recruited and interviewed in the Region of Peel which consists of Brampton, Mississauga & Caledon.



Figure 1. From "Mother Holding Newborn", by Snugglebugz, 2020
https://www.snugglebugz.ca/learning_centre/5-hospital-appropriate-gifts-for-the-new-mama
 Copyright 2020 by Snugglebugz.

Figure 2



Results and Discussion

Difficulties in Pregnancy

- All five participants expressed their concerns over their experiences during and after pregnancy "I'm constantly getting stared at or like people would come up to me and they're like constantly judging me or asking me why do I have a kid at a young age" (Participant H)
- Welcoming a child also meant that these mother's suffered through challenging emotions after delivery as they felt sleep deprived and struggled with body image issues. "I hated my body and I hated the way I looked and it would depress me (Participant M)
- Health complications in this study made it challenging to transition in the pregnancy stages as some participants had a cesarean delivery, hyperemesis gravidarum, fertility concerns, breastfeeding and placenta previa

Personal Support vs Public Support

- Support was highly emphasized by all participants as it held a greater significance. All participants had access to great personal support by a partner, mother or sister while health care professionals like doctors, social workers, midwives and social programs were forms of public support
- "I had tremendous help from my partner from my family, they were all there for me. My sister has two kids so I had her and my mom and my younger sister. So, If I think I was able to manage it was only and only because of my family" (Participant S)
- Social support is presented through a "provision or exchange of emotional, informational, or instrumental resources in response to the perception that others are in need of such aid." (Moseson, Mahanaimy & Dehlendorf, 2019, p. 2)

Security and Positivity

- "I had mood swings, I would find myself randomly crying, I would find myself extremely frustrated like I would get so angry" (Participant K)
- All participants recognized that a few weeks in the postpartum period were troublesome due to hormonal changes in their bodies, changes in physical appearance and mostly importantly allocating time for self-care.
- "When they're just born it's hard to have that like bond with them so at first, I was feeling that I wasn't a good mother I, I didn't really know what to do". (Participant H)

Online Networking or Assistance

- Most mother's felt comfortable using the internet as a guide to not only educate themselves about their pregnancy but also to locate current programs that offer social support for mothers' or breastfeeding assistance
- 'Google' was preferred by many mothers', "Every time I needed something if I felt down, why am I feeling this way and google would be like oh watch your diet, fix your sleep so I just started doing that but definitely google a lot" (Participant N)
- Internet use was successful and informative to some mothers' "particularly when they were new at mothering, and they appreciated that there was unlimited information at their fingertips". (Moon, Mathews & Oden, 2019, p. 3)

Importance of a Partners Role

- Each participant accentuated on the role of their partners as it mattered the most, without the support of partners leads to avoidance and it "may lead to failure to seek appropriate help or support, leading to isolation and inadequate cognitive processing, prolonging symptom duration". (Iles, Slade & Spiby, 2011, p. 521)
- "even if he had work at 6 am, he stayed with me. Like he wasn't like oh leave the room the baby's crying all night. He was more like were doing this together. (Participant N)
- "I was supported by a partner a lot. For three months straight basically, he taught me how to change diapers and how to take care of the baby" (Participant M). Mothers' expressed the need for positive interactions, emotional wellness and involved in a secured relationship

Codes	Themes
• Complication	1. Difficulties in Pregnancy
• Challenges	2. Personal Support vs Public Support
• Support	3. Security and Positivity
• Partner Involvement	4. Online Assistance or Networking
• Emotion	5. Importance of a partners role
• Continuous Support	
• Internet	
• Programs	
• Partner Involvement	
• Emotion	

Figure 3

Conclusion and Limitations of Research

This study intended to learn about a mother's perspective, based on the results, future researchers should focus on studies that analyzes a mother's readiness, preparedness and understanding of pregnancy. To investigate what measurements are needed to support mothers' and how can these experiences can be protected for the betterment of both mother and child. Future studies should focus on:

- Conducting studies across Canada as this study focused on mothers' in the Region of Peel
- Recruiting more young mothers' as their experiences vary from adults
- A sample size including mothers from different cultural backgrounds especially immigrants mothers'. Literature review stated that they are more likely to develop postpartum depression because of the challenges they may encounter.