
Experiences of Women Suffering from Postnatal Depression in Black Minority Ethnicity: Analytical Essay

1. Abstract

In this report, I will be describing some experiences of women suffering from postnatal depression in black minority ethnicity.

Everyone enjoys the birth of their child, it is a time of joy and new experience for some mothers and the rest of family members such as fathers, grandparents, and extended others. Being a mother can sometimes have negative consequences if she becomes depressed. According to (Clay & Seehusen, 2004; Miller, 2002) Postnatal depression is a complex and challenging disorder that often takes women and their families by surprise and can have tremendous individual and family consequences. Approximately 10 to 20 percent of women experience postnatal depression (Miller, 2002), and between 25 and 50 percent of mothers with postnatal depression have episodes lasting for a period of six months or longer (Beck, 2002). This was determined mostly from studies conducted in black minority ethnicity.

2. Introduction

Many women especially from black minority ethnicity are experiencing the effect of postnatal depression but do not discuss it and normally put it down to just being tired. The effect can either be positive or negative to a person. Depression is a common condition among women in the United Kingdom however, there are not much that is known or said about depression among African Caribbean women. Despite high levels of social factors, black women of Caribbean origin sometimes refuse to consult health professionals regarding symptoms of postnatal depression. I myself experience postnatal depression but thought that I did not need professional help. Reasons for this are unclear as there has been little postnatal mental health research among this ethnic group. Because of negative experiences of services by black and minority ethnic communities in general, and black Caribbean members in particular, their fear and mistrust, makes them reluctant to engage with mental health services. Their beliefs about mental illness, the fear of stigma, and their help seeking approaches make it difficult for them to seek help.

3. Statement of the problem

The purpose of this study is to determine the negative effects of postnatal depression in black minority ethnicity and the method used to manage their mental health

4. Literature review

According to another qualitative study that focused on the negative effects of cultural beliefs upon women's mental well-being (Amankwaa, 2000). In this observation the researcher aimed at generating theory to identify the social factors that black minority women become adjusted to this condition. There were six themes which emerged from the data collected, among which the

theme titled “dealing with it” was found to have a cultural background in the lives of these women. The women were found to be trying to live up to the image of being a “strong Black woman,” and believed the myth that postnatal depression was an illness that happens to “White women”. They felt ashamed and afraid of discussing, or having depression. In addition, some of these women relied on prayer or faith women from their religious background to assist them in coping with their depression. These are widely held beliefs by many women of black minority ethnicity and sometimes stop these women seeking professional help. This results in the further deterioration of their mental wellbeing and their postnatal depression. Amankwaa also suggested that these culturally sanctioned strategies is likely to serve as barriers instead of making it easier for these women to seek a successful end of their postnatal depression and therefore their mental state continues to deteriorate. (Amankwaa, 2000)

Black Caribbean nationals are a similar group to settled migrants of black ethnicity and as a result, were selected, however, the majority of the participants in this study were born in the UK but consider themselves to be of black Caribbean origin. In comparison to the large volume of research into the mental health of new mothers, there has been relatively little research done among women from this ethnic group. Focus groups were used, in part, to examine the perceived inconsistency in previous accounts of black Caribbean women's unwillingness to openly discuss psychological problems while simultaneously support the importance of their peer.

5. Method of study

This study is used to gain an understanding of woman and was specifically selected to represent a range of perspectives and experiences that would give reason, opinion, and motivations into the issues that may contribute to low levels of diagnosed postnatal depression in this ethnic group. This included self-identification as ‘black Caribbean’ and being aged 18 years or over. No restrictions were placed on how long-ago the deliveries were made, but the majority had children who were aged under 2 years old. Some of the participants were recruited via posters in community settings, use of local media, community radio and local newspapers, contacts in churches with a congregation that was mainly black, and NHS organizations maximised within-group diversity. The participants included women aged 18–43 years, those who lived in the inner city and the suburbs, single parents, and women who were married or cohabiting. The recruitment via churches with a mainly black congregation was based on previous findings that black Caribbean women in the area that the study was undertaken frequently sought support for psychological distress from the church during and after pregnancy, even if they were not religious or have a religious background.

There were a total of five focus groups, each of which contained between 6 and 10 women. Two of the five groups comprised regular church attendees, two were from the wider community who did not go to church and one was a mixed group. The focus group sessions lasted between 60 and 90 minutes each. They were conducted by the author in various community settings including women's homes and a ‘black majority’ church hall. All interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed in the exact word without changing anything.

The focuses were on black Caribbean women's perceptions and their experiences of current services and the factors that might act as barriers to them accessing care and treatment. These women were also asked to describe key differences between their ‘ideal service’ model and

the current provision.

6. Experiences of current services and barriers to care

The primary aim of the study was to examine black minority women's views regarding postnatal mental health care and the factors that may account for the seemingly low levels of women seeking treatment. The discussions frequently widened to include the provision of healthcare in generally. The women often began to talk about their postnatal mental health care by relating experiences of the physical care that they received during and after their pregnancy, and how this was related to their unwillingness to consult for psychological problems. Only a minority of women spoke positively about their care, while the remainder indicated that maternity care was not good. Perceptions of positive or negative experiences and good or poor care often depends on whether their care had been received in the community or in a hospital.