



CLAHRCBITE

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Conscientization for practice:

The design and delivery of an immersive educational programme to sensitise maternity professionals to the potential for traumatic birth experiences amongst disadvantaged and vulnerable young women.



An educational programme underpinned by critical theory and use of virtual reality provides maternity professionals with an innovative and immersive approach to explore and reflect upon interpersonal issues associated with birth trauma amongst disadvantaged and vulnerable young women.

Birth is an important time in a woman's life. While the journey into motherhood can be a transformational experience, unfortunately, this is not the case for every woman. It is estimated that approximately 30% of women experience childbirth as a traumatic event, with up to 4% of women in community samples developing Post Traumatic Distress Disorder (PTSD) following childbirth. It also highlighted that women who are vulnerable and disadvantaged, due to complex life situations such as poor mental health, poverty and social isolation, are more likely to receive birth trauma and PTSD onset.

Research highlights that women's subjective experience of birth is one of the most important factors in determining birth trauma, and that negative interactions with health care professionals are a key contributor to its development. The aim of this study was to develop and evaluate a training

programme for maternity care providers to raise awareness of birth trauma amongst disadvantaged and vulnerable women. A critical pedagogical approach was adopted so that the design of the programme would aid reflection, critical thinking and conscientization and used immersive technologies as part of an experiential learning approach.

What was the aim of the project?

The aim of the project was to assess the feasibility and acceptability of a tailored educational programme to reduce traumatic birth experiences and subsequent PTSD amongst disadvantaged and vulnerable women.



What did we do?

First, a meta-ethnography was undertaken to explore disadvantaged and vulnerable women's negative experiences of maternity care in high income countries. Four key themes were identified from 18 studies; '*Depersonalisation*', '*Dehumanisation*', '*Them & us*' and '*No care in the care*'. Second, ten disadvantaged and vulnerable women from North West England were recruited and interviewed to explore the negative experiences of birth. Insights from the review and the interviews were used to inform the content of a filmed childbirth scenario that was embedded within a critical pedagogical framework. The scenario was delivered to participants using virtual reality technology, forming part of a 90-minute educational programme, in which maternity professionals view a traumatic birth experience from a first-person perspective. Other elements of the education programme involved providing insights and evidence on birth trauma and PTSD, discussions to aid critical reflections and the development of practice points to be shared with colleagues to influence care practice. Ten maternity professionals participated in an evaluation of the



educational programme, with pre/post questionnaires and a follow-up session used to assess participants attitudes, knowledge and experiences prior, during and following attendance.

How did we involve people?

Women who were vulnerable and marginalised (based on prior established criteria by the World Health Organization) were recruited from local Sure Start and Children Centres to partake in interviews exploring their traumatic experiences. The filmed scenario used within the educational programme was based on empirical accounts collected via secondary (meta-ethnography) and primary (interview) data. All midwifery staff involved in the evaluation were recruited from one NHS Trust in North West England.

What we found and what does this mean?

Findings suggest the immersive educational programme increased participants' understanding and knowledge of birth trauma and PTSD, and the use of virtual reality enhanced critical reflection and facilitated praxis. While further research to test the efficacy of the educational programme on women's birth experiences is needed, simulated first person realities, embedded with a critical pedagogical framework, offer a unique and innovative approach to addressing interpersonal care in maternity and wider health-related contexts of care.

What next?

Journal publications are currently underway. Discussions will also take place to apply for funding for a formal evaluation of the educational programme and to develop this work further for different audiences.

What is NIHR ARC North West?

The Applied Research Collaboration, North West Coast is a partnership between universities, NHS, councils and other stakeholders, and the public. Our mission is to undertake applied research to improve public health, wellbeing, quality of care & reduce health inequalities across the North West Coast region. ARC NWC is funded by the National Institute for Health Research.

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