I'm Pregnant, Now What?:
Acceptability and Efficacy of an Expressive Writing Intervention to Promote Coping and Adaptation

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Structured Abstract

LOCAL PROBLEM
Research has linked unintended pregnancies with delayed and inadequate prenatal care, premature birth, birth defects, infant mortality, risky behaviors during pregnancy, and higher medical costs. As a result, Healthy People 2020 has established family planning goals and interventions designed to decrease unintended pregnancies. However, it is imperative to develop solutions that assist maternal adaptation when an unintended pregnancy occurs as a means to curtail adverse events. Women facing an unintended pregnancy report negative emotional reactions including dissatisfaction, anxiety, hatred, and shock. Furthermore, higher rates of depression and stress along with lower self-efficacy scores exist among women with unwanted pregnancies. When facing an unintended pregnancy, emotional processing and adaptation can be challenging, especially if confronted by a paucity of resources.

PROJECT PURPOSE
The purpose of this project was to implement an expressive writing intervention at a faith-based crisis pregnancy center to enhance emotional processing and promote holistic adaptation for women facing an unintended pregnancy utilizing the Roy Adaptation Model (RAM) to guide the practice change.

METHODOLOGY
The RAM provides a framework that addresses the four modes of adaptation (physiologic, self-concept, role function, and interdependence) to assist the client with an unintended pregnancy through emotional processing and holistic adaptation via the utilization of an expressive writing intervention. Roy explains that it is through coping and adaptation processing that one’s response is oriented upon survival, growth, reproduction, mastery, and transcendence. This project was implemented at a faith-based crisis pregnancy test center in Birmingham, Alabama offering medical, counseling, and educational services to pregnant women. The expressive writing intervention was incorporated into existing weekly pregnancy education classes. Participants were asked to write for 10 minutes about their deepest thoughts and feelings regarding the pregnancy irrespective of spelling or grammar. At the end of class, participants were asked to complete the Coping and Adaptation Processing Scale (CAPS) and a Post-Intervention Survey to assess acceptability and elicit participant feedback. Participants were provided a journal to continue writing at home before the next class.
RESULTS
An expressive writing intervention was found to be feasible, acceptable, and efficacious in promoting coping and adaptation among women facing an unintended pregnancy. Among participants, 80% reported they would continue to journal at home, 93% stated expressive writing was beneficial, and 93% recommended presenting expressive writing opportunities to pregnant clients. In a review of participant writings, themes emerged in all four adaptive modes illustrating that expressive writing prompted participant identification of avenues for adaption in the physiologic, self-concept, interdependence, and role function modes. When comparing participant CAPS scores after the first and second writing sessions, 27% reported an improved ability to obtain resources to manage the distressing situation and 36% reported an improved ability to develop a plan with a series of actions to manage a situation or event.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE
Expressive writing was found to be a low-cost intervention that helped participants identify opportunities for coping and adaptation. Incorporation of expressive writing is recommended for all educational offerings at the pregnancy test center. Based on participant feedback, introduction of expressive writing is also recommended for medical clinic clients at the time of a positive pregnancy test. This can serve as an impetus to promote early adaptation to pregnancy and encourage engagement in appropriate prenatal care, to make healthy pregnancy decisions, and to seek available government and community resources.

*Keywords:* expressive writing, unintended pregnancy, coping, adaptation, Roy Adaptation Model

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