Navigating an Uncertain Journey of Pregnancy After Perinatal Loss

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Disclosure

• The authors are as follows:
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• The authors report that they have no conflict of interest with this presentation and have received no compensation for this presentation.
Learning Objectives

• By the end of the presentation the learners:

  • Will be able to list at least three areas of concern for mothers pregnant after a prior perinatal loss.

  • Will be able to describe at least two strategies for helping a mother pregnant after a prior perinatal loss.
Purpose of Study

• This study aimed to gain insight into women’s experiences, anxiety, and prenatal attachment over the course of pregnancy subsequent to prior perinatal loss through written pregnancy diaries.
Background

- Grief and bereavement most common responses to perinatal loss; may last for months or years (Cacciatore, 2013; Wojner, Swanson & Adolfsson, 2011).
- Loss at any gestational age is loss of part of self, of a unique child, and of the future with that child (Davis, 2014).
- Women with a perinatal loss history want get pregnant again to fill the void & to maintain a connection to their dead child (Lee, McKenzie-McHarg & Horsch, 2013).
- Pregnancy after perinatal loss is characterized as anxiety-laden due to fear of another loss, and loss of trust in pregnancy (Côté-Arsenault, Schwartz, Krowchuk & McCoy, 2014).
Intervention study

• Conducted in 2007
• Recruited from Central and Western New York
• Designed to reduce pregnancy anxiety in women pregnant after a prior perinatal loss (Côté-Arsenault, Schwartz, Krowchuk, McCoy, 2014).
• Intervention included home visits by a nurse to intervention group
• Also: Pregnancy information, emotional support, promoted prenatal attachment, anxiety and stress reduction techniques.
• One technique was the use of a pregnancy diary (provided)
Secondary Analysis

- Diaries available from 19 pregnant women with loss history
- Diary entries and pages were the data analyzed
- Colaizzi’s phenomenological method used as the framework for analysis (Colaizzi, 1978)
  - Read independently by researchers
  - Concepts and impressions content discussed jointly
  - Significant quotes extracted from diaries; typed into a digital file.
  - Sorted and compiled into meaningful groups
  - Iterative process of analysis; all significant quotes were included and that the meaning and context had not been missed on the initial extraction.
- Themes were finalized to form a picture of pregnancy after loss
- Metaphor emerged
### Demographics and Obstetrical History of Participants

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<td>Living Biological Children</td>
<td>0-4</td>
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<td>0.89 (1.1)</td>
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</table>
Week 12

You are growing so big and strong, my sweetheart; you are a beloved child of life.

Sun

Mon

Tue

Wed

Thur

Fri

Sat

Your baby is growing rapidly and is now 2 3/4 long. Baby is moving even thought can’t feel all that is going on inside.

Things I find reassuring

Skill Practice

Relaxation

Relaxation CD Used

12
Results

Metaphor: Pregnancy after Loss is an Uncertain Journey

Six themes emerged from the diary entries:
1) Staying Alert: Noting Physical Symptoms
2) Dealing with Uncertainty: Expressing Emotions
3) Dreaming of the Destination: Evolving Thoughts of Baby
4) Traveling Together: Connecting with Others
5) Moving Forward: Reflecting on Sense of Self

The interaction of several themes is described as:
6) Staying on Track: Navigating through Pregnancy
Interacting Forces: Navigating through Pregnancy

- Traveling Together: Connecting with Others
- Staying Alert: Noting Physical Symptoms
- Dealing with Uncertainty: Expressing Emotions
- Dreaming of the Destination: Evolving Thoughts of Baby
- Moving Forward: Reflecting Sense of Self

Pregnancy Journey

Healthy Baby

Destination
Metaphor: Navigating an Uncertain Journey

- Metaphor was sought to increase understanding of mothers’ experiences (Miles, Huberman & Saldāna, 2014)
- Mothers spoke of their pregnancy like navigating a journey in hopes of reaching their destination, a healthy baby
- Uncertain and scary at times, they navigated their way
- Mothers did not make it through pregnancy along a direct path, they zigged and zagged, feeling positive one day and not as upbeat on another.
Staying Alert: Noting Physical Symptoms

- Physical symptoms closely monitored and used as evidence that the unborn baby was alive; drop in symptoms could cause extreme distress.
  - 21 weeks: “Panicked because I hadn’t felt movement in a couple days but when I changed position on my couch I felt flutters and knew the baby is still alive!”
  - 15 weeks: “All my pregnancy symptoms seemed to cease. I panicked and called to see if I could go in [to the doctor].”
  - Factual lists or statements: “active baby”; “lots of movement”
- Discomforts of pregnancy early on; fetal movement in the early second trimester
  - One of the anxiety-reducing techniques in the study intervention was the counting of fetal movements for reassurance, although not all mothers did so.
Dealing with Uncertainty: Expressing Emotions

• Overall more negative emotions recorded:
  • 24 weeks “It amazes me how quickly that fear can return out of nowhere...that realization that none of this is really under my control...even though I can control what I eat – how much I rest & be careful...I still can’t control the baby’s health.”

• Positive emotions increased as pregnancies progressed

• Anniversaries of their previous loss had mixed reactions
  • 24 weeks “This week is the anniversary of my miscarriage. The 17th, to be exact, will be one year. I was confident before, but now I’m even more confident that this pregnancy will come to term”
  • 14 weeks “Monday night I got quite upset because this was the anniversary of when I returned to the hospital for more bleeding with [my previous loss]...These past few weeks have been like watching a train wreck in slow motion...”
Dreaming of the Destination: Evolving Thoughts of Baby

• Mothers transitioned from guarding themselves and delaying bonding with their babies to becoming more hopeful and confident
  • 10 weeks “…I still feel sad that I can’t bond with this baby. I want to but I am too scared to. I feel that if I do I will just be more upset that this baby doesn’t make it.”
  • “We made it to 12 weeks! I’m so excited! I am finally starting to calm down a little bit & I am really thinking about what it will be like when the baby comes.”
  • 31 weeks “I can’t believe you will be here soon [baby’s name]. I’m scared and excited and nervous and overjoyed all at the same time. I love you Baby Girl!”
Traveling Together: Connecting with Others

• Mothers often selectively limited those who knew of their pregnancy and for close contacts for support
  • 9 weeks: “After my 2nd doctor’s appointment I am starting to tell people that I am pregnant but only people who need to know. I don’t want a lot of people knowing because that’s more people I will have to tell that something went wrong and I am no longer pregnant.”
• Pressure from friends and family sometimes to bond and prepare for baby
• Often sought reassurance from healthcare providers
• Women spoke of lack of support or understanding of what they were going through
  • 23 weeks “Tried to go see an old friend...whom I haven’t been able to talk to in several months. Didn’t go quite like I wanted it to. The bottom line is that I didn’t feel like she understood”
• Intervention nurse reported as someone who understood
Moving Forward: Reflecting on Sense of Self

• Impact of previous loss on themselves and this pregnancy
• Lack of confidence in being a mother to unborn child and other live children
  • 25 weeks: “This week we got a new baby calf and after 2 days it wouldn’t drink its whole bucket [of milk]. This was frustrating for me because I felt like a failure and tried everything. I just want it to be normal and I feel like if my calf isn’t successful how can I raise a baby?”
• Often conscious of own monitoring
  • 24 weeks “Not a lot of definite movement this weekend. Which put me in quite a cranky mood... I just hate to be a prisoner to this pregnancy.”
Staying on Track: Navigating Through Pregnancy

• Pregnancy anxiety was inversely related to confidence and hope
  • Greatly influenced by pregnancy symptoms
  • 17 weeks “One minute I feel confident that I will carry this baby to term. Then, I have the feeling that I’m leaking fluid & I fear my water will break”
  • 31 weeks: “I hadn’t felt [the baby] move in 12 hours, went crazy crying, called doctor’s. Went in to office and they found her heart beat. Was the best sound I’ve heard in a long time!”

• Prenatal attachment increased throughout pregnancy
  • Baby names
  • Baby showers
  • Telling more people
Strengths

• Written in their words on their time frame
• Spanned length of pregnancy
• Trustworthiness increased by different researcher perspectives: one expert and one novice

Limitations

• All women received prenatal care
• Diary entries- more data from those who like to write
• Data obtained from intervention group
Clinical Implications

• Assessment:
  • Listen to their stories of past pregnancies
  • Evaluate anxiety levels at start and throughout pregnancy
  • Evaluate prenatal attachment and confidence.

• Intervention:
  • Anticipatory guidance: what should they expect
  • Reinforce that mother not alone - common experience
  • Educate mother and her social support system, if able
  • Make nurses and other health care providers available to mother for support (calls, frequent visits, emergency plans).
References


