

Session S10.1

Experiences of disabled women during pregnancy, childbirth and early parenting services: implications for occupational therapy

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The aim of this study was to understand the experiences of women with physical and sensory disability during their interaction with maternity services. The study was funded by a national charity whose previous research identified that disabled women had more negative experiences than non-disabled women (Birthrights, 2013). This paper specifically discusses implications for occupational therapy.

Two-phase, inter-professional mixed methods research was used involving online surveys in phase 1 and narrative interviews in phase 2. Recruitment was through disability and parenting networks and social media. Survey data were analysed descriptively and open questions were themed. Phase 2 telephone interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed thematically.

Although overall satisfaction with care was scored highly in phase 1, negative experiences were described. Key challenges included a lack of continuity of carer; women feeling that they were not being listened to; feeling they were treated less favourably because of disability; and 56% feeling that maternity care providers did not have appropriate attitudes to disability. Interview themes echoed these, when women described implications of not being listened to, including that their judgement about their own bodies was ignored or undermined.

The research revealed that occupational therapists did little to support women during this time. While some occupational therapy input was described, this focused on equipment provision. Minimal support with the occupations of parenting was described. The results suggest a clear need for interprofessional working and the need for occupational therapists to liaise between midwifery staff and disabled women.

Ethical approval for both phases of the research was secured from Bournemouth University.

References

Birthrights. 2013. Dignity in Childbirth: the Dignity Survey 2013: women's and midwives' experiences of UK maternity care. London. Birthrights. Accessed 09/10/14. Available from: <http://www.birthrights.org.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Birthrights-Dignity-Survey.pdf>

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