



Synopsis

Identifying acceptable and effective methods of assessing perinatal anxiety: the MAP study

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Plain language summary

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Plain language summary

Anxiety is common during or after pregnancy, but it is not always detected. This can cause problems for mothers and babies. Ways of identifying anxiety need to be acceptable to women, staff and services, and they should correctly identify those women who want treatment. The 'Methods of Assessing Perinatal anxiety' (MAP) research project aimed to identify the best way to screen women for anxiety during pregnancy and after birth to identify those who want treatment.

This was achieved through three research studies comparing four questionnaires to identify perinatal anxiety, and the research was conducted in National Health Service services in England and Scotland. Questionnaires were selected based on clinical criteria and reviews of the available evidence.

Study 1 identified whether questionnaires were acceptable by interviewing 41 women who were pregnant or had recently given birth. Their views and experiences of being asked about anxiety or mental health during and after pregnancy revealed that all questionnaires were acceptable, and screening for perinatal mental health was viewed positively.

Study 2 identified the most effective questionnaire to detect anxiety in perinatal women who want treatment. It established that early pregnancy is the best time to identify most women with anxiety. To do this, 2243 women completed the questionnaires three times during pregnancy and once after birth, and diagnostic interviews were carried out with 403 of these women.

Study 3 found that routine screening for perinatal anxiety is feasible and acceptable to health professionals. An acceptable and effective questionnaire, the Stirling Antenatal Anxiety Scale, was introduced and it was used in two National Health Service sites in England and one in Scotland; and 27 health professionals were interviewed about their experiences of this. Based on these findings, a guide was developed to help other National Health Service services to put screening for perinatal anxiety into practice.

This research identifies accurate and acceptable questionnaire measures for everyday use in health services. By helping to identify anxiety early, this may enable mothers to get the support they need sooner, potentially improving their well-being in longer term. Over time, this research may contribute to better care for anxiety during and after pregnancy and reduce the wider effects of untreated anxiety on families.

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