Factors influencing health behaviour change during pregnancy: A systematic review and thematic synthesis of qualitative studies

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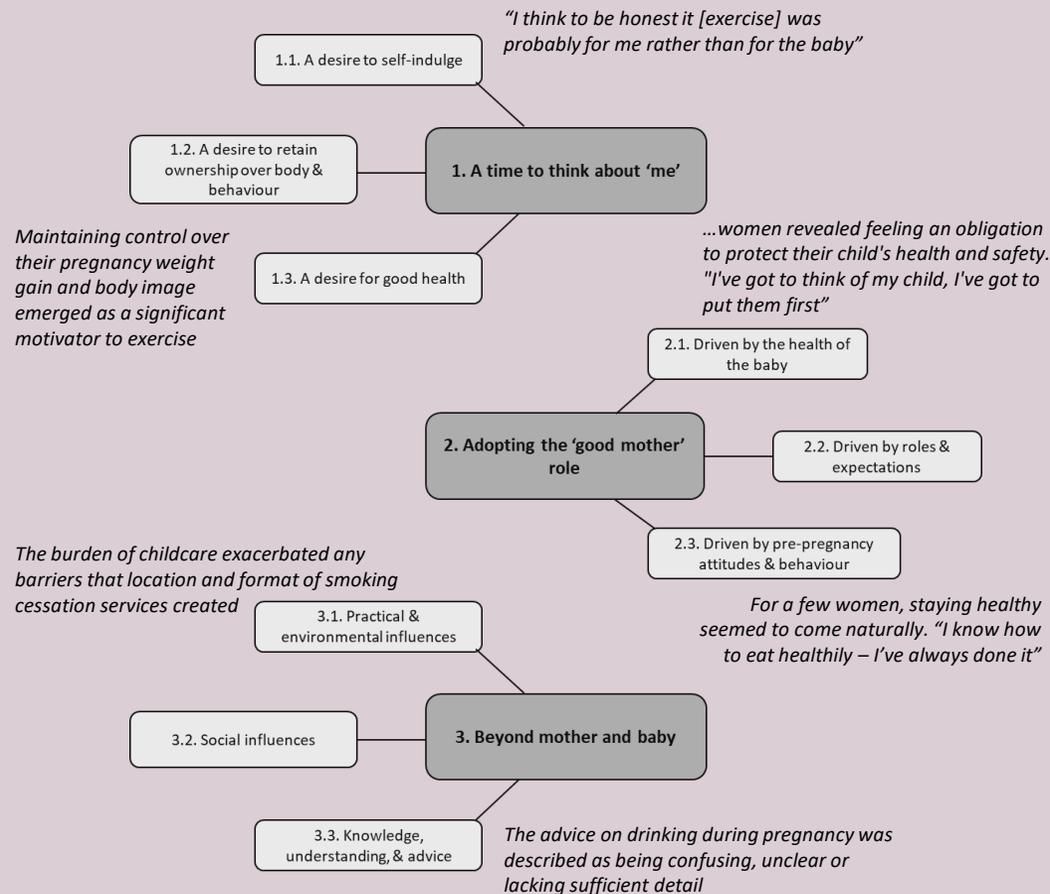The University of Manchester

Background

- Pregnancy is an opportune time for women to make healthy changes to their lifestyle.

- Encouraging women to adopt healthy behaviours during pregnancy has the potential to reduce the risk of pregnancy-related conditions, obstetric complications, and improve long-term health outcomes for the mother and child.

- Whilst some women make changes automatically, or with ease, others may find it challenging or are resistant to change.

- **Aim:** To identify factors influencing health behaviour change during pregnancy, specific to dietary behaviour, physical activity, smoking, and alcohol use.

Methods

- MEDLINE, PsycINFO, CINAHL-P, and MIDIRS were systematically searched to retrieve studies reporting qualitative data about women's experiences or perceptions of behaviour change relating to the four key behaviours.

- Main eligibility criteria: Studies conducted in high-income countries, and including participants ≥18 years old and pregnant, or ≤2 years postnatal.

- 30,852 records were identified and 92 studies were included.

- Study quality was assessed using the CASP tool.

- Extracted data were thematically synthesised.

Results

- Three overarching themes and nine sub-themes were generated that reflected factors influencing women's antenatal health behaviour.

"I think to be honest it [exercise] was probably for me rather than for the baby"

1.1. A desire to self-indulge

1.2. A desire to retain ownership over body & behaviour

1. A time to think about 'me'

Maintaining control over their pregnancy weight gain and body image emerged as a significant motivator to exercise

1.3. A desire for good health

…women revealed feeling an obligation to protect their child's health and safety. "I've got to think of my child, I've got to put them first"

2.1. Driven by the health of the baby

2. Adopting the 'good mother' role

2.2. Driven by roles & expectations

2.3. Driven by pre-pregnancy attitudes & behaviour

For a few women, staying healthy seemed to come naturally. "I know how to eat healthily – I've always done it"

The burden of childcare exacerbated any barriers that location and format of smoking cessation services created

3.1. Practical & environmental influences

3.2. Social influences

3. Beyond mother and baby

3.3. Knowledge, understanding, & advice

The advice on drinking during pregnancy was described as being confusing, unclear or lacking sufficient detail

Conclusions

- A myriad of internal and external factors may affect women's motivation to change their health behaviour.

- In clinical practice, it is important to take a holistic view of maternal health when delivering behaviour change advice.

- This improved understanding of the mechanisms underlying maternal motivation and decision-making provides the foundations from which future pregnancy-specific theories of behaviour change can be developed.