

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES IN A FUTURE PREGNANCY AFTER PERINATAL BEREAVEMENT: HOW DO THEIR NEEDS SHIFT?

Background

From the pre-pregnancy to the postnatal period, future mothers having experienced a previous perinatal bereavement undergo alternating emotions ranging from happiness to fear and anxiety. Whereas some attention has been paid to the needs of mothers during future pregnancies, little has been done to create resources for them.

Methods

A qualitative research was carried out with 8 women in the context of a focus group. Complimentary data were gathered through phone interviews and written responses.

Results

From pregnancy to the postpartum period, women identified various challenges met in regards to the pregnancy. These challenges related to the concepts of

- 1. Conflicting emotions from joy to grief: "We get pregnant and we have to deal with this pregnancy, but there is still the grief, plus all the people around to deal with, their comments, their reactions that are a little upseting." (Marika)
- 2. A sense of urgency "making up for lost time": The life plan has now been altered. Some women always feel one child "behind". "It's the impression maybe that all our life we will be running after something that slipped between our fingers. Because that child will never come back. No matter how many we have." (Sarah)
- 3. Fear of the unknown: anxiety and stress relating to the new pregnancy, learning to let go. "It's hard to enjoy the pregnancy when you know that pregnancy no longer equals necessarily a baby. I was obsessed with checking that my baby was still alive." (Jamilla)

- 4. Loss of trust in the pregnancy process: a positive outcome is no longer a guarantee, there is never a guarantee. "It's not because you name came out of the hat once, that it won't be drawn again." (Éléonor)
- 5. Isolation from peers: no longer desiring to participate in regular pregnancy classes or activities, a sense of not belonging, not being able to find support there. "I waited at home most of my pregnancy, waiting for things to happen. I spent my time on my couch being afraid." (Alina)
- 6. Difficult interactions with professionals: having their fears minimized or not having an established relationship with the professionnal. "They kept telling us it couldn't happen again even though noweone ever new why it happened the first time around." (Kamille)

What is helpful according to these women?

- Good listening skills by the professional
- Compassion
- Continuity of care
- Being in a relationship with a professional who is not afraid to refer to their deceased child by his name
- Feeling like the fears are not ignored
- Being offered psychological support by a professional

Conclusions

Professionals can provide better support for couples experiencing a pregnancy after perinatal bereavement. Following these interviews, a support group for couples experiencing a future pregnancy was set up to meet the needs of this specific population. An online space to promote sharing and peer support was created as well.

References

http://cerif.uqo.ca/en/death-and-mourning

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