

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC FOR PERINATAL MENTAL HEALTH CARE: A MIXED METHODS STUDY OF MENTAL HEALTH CARE STAFF

Claire A Wilson^a, Christian Dalton-Locke^b, Sonia Johnson^b, Alan Simpson^a, Sian Oram^a, Louise M Howard^a

^aDepartment of Health Services and Population Research, Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience, King's College London, UK

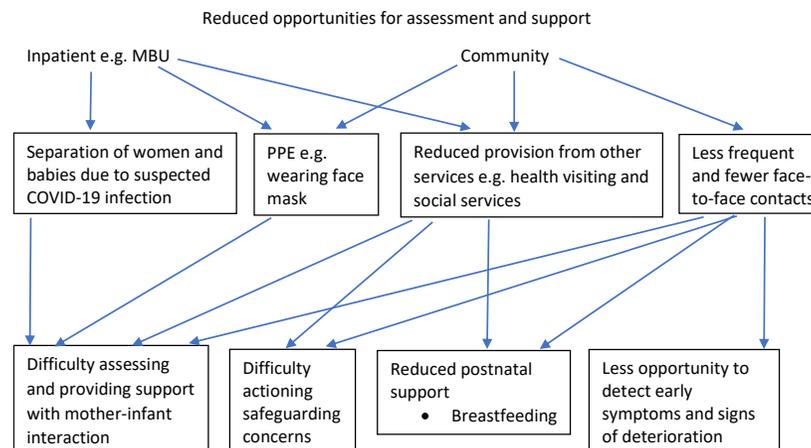
^bNIHR Mental Health Policy Research Unit, Division of Psychiatry, University College London, UK

Introduction: risk factors for mental illness associated with the pandemic may disproportionately affect the perinatal population. The aim of this study was to explore, among those working in mental health services in the UK, the impact of the pandemic on the mental health care provided to women in the perinatal period.

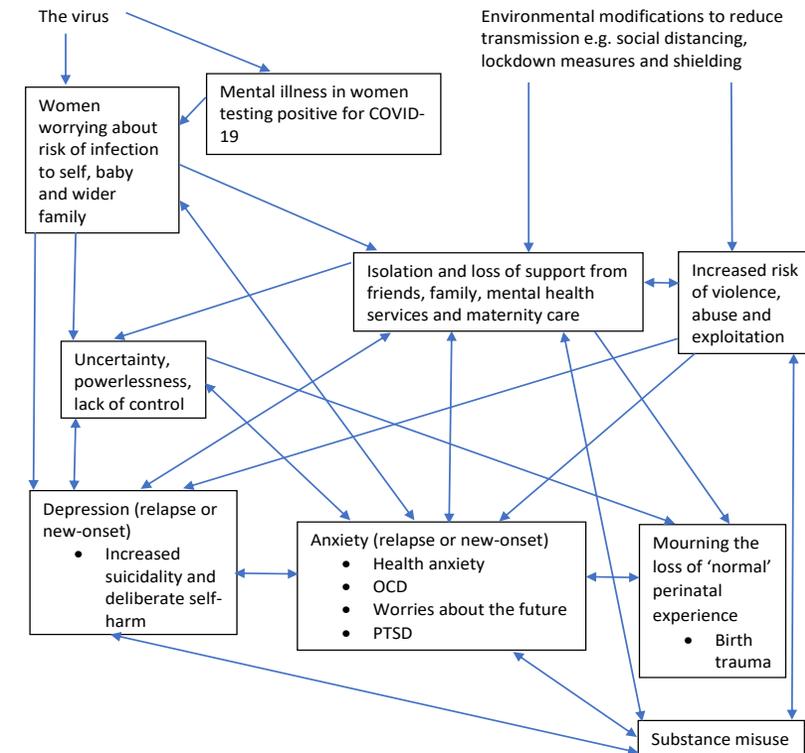
Methods: secondary analysis of an online mixed-methods survey open to all mental health care staff in the UK involving 363 staff working with women in the perinatal period. Now published: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00737-021-01108-5>

Results: perinatal mental health was perceived to be particularly vulnerable to the impact of stressors such as social isolation (rated by 79.3% as relevant or extremely relevant) and domestic violence and abuse (53.3%). As a result of changes to service delivery, staff felt less able to assess women, particularly their relationship with their baby (43.3%), and to mobilise safeguarding procedures (29.4%). Some staff found flexible remote consulting to be beneficial for some women and helped time management due to reductions in travel time.

Challenges to perinatal mental health service provision expressed by staff (themes in boxes)



Concerns from staff about areas of difficulty for perinatal service users and their perceived impacts (themes in boxes)



Conclusions: care delivery needs to be tailored to women's needs and risk assessment must remain robust in spite of modifications made to service delivery during pandemics.