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Women’s experiences of anxiety during pregnancy: an interpretative phenomenological analysis

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Background & Aim

- Pregnancy is a time of transformation and transition.
- Approximately 15% of women will experience clinical levels of anxiety during pregnancy.
- Identifying and treating general anxiety during pregnancy is difficult due to the current application of general diagnostic criteria.
- Focusing on antenatal anxiety is important because it is associated with higher risk of:
  - maternal postnatal depression,
  - excess production of cortisol impacting baby’s neurodevelopment,
  - disruptions in perinatal attachments between mother and baby.
- Previous qualitative studies examined antenatal anxiety collectively under the umbrella term of ‘distress’ but in-depth exploration of the experiences of anxiety during pregnancy is lacking.

Method

- 7 women: recruited from antenatal clinic/online ads
- **Focus 1:** experience of anxiety during pregnancy
- **Focus 2:** communicating anxiety during pregnancy
- **Focus 3:** seeking women’s advice on how to improve healthcare support
- **Analysis:** interpretative phenomenological analysis

Inclusion:
- 18+ years and English speaker
- Any stage of pregnancy
- Self identify as experienced generalised anxiety
- Primigravida or multigravida women

Exclusion:
- Other psychiatric diagnoses
- High risk pregnancy
- Previous miscarriages or traumatic birth
- In vitro pregnancies

Results & Clinical implications

1. Adjustment to pregnancy & motherhood & the experiences of anxiety
2. Unfamiliarity, uncertainty & uncontrollability of pregnancy influences anxiety
3. Personal & social expectations & pressures of pregnancy & motherhood
4. Relying on healthcare systems – the good & bad

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