An online resilience-enhancing intervention for pregnant women: a feasibility study.

Background

Pregnancy and the transition to parenthood are accompanied by multiple changes and stress exposure. There is a lack of prenatal programmes that aim to promote resilience by stimulating existing protective factors or focus on prevention of mental health problems [1]. A 28-week online intervention program inspired by the Behaviour Change Wheel Framework and the theoretical model of perinatal resilience was developed [2,3]. The intervention consists of three online group sessions, resilience-enhancing exercises, and an online peer-support platform, aiming to enhance resilience and to prevent mental health problems during and after pregnancy [4].

Aim(s)

The aim of the current study was to evaluate the feasibility of this intervention for pregnant women.

Methods

In total 70 women enrolled in a resilience-enhancing intervention. Postintervention the Client Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ-8) was assessed (4). Additionally, from the group of women active at follow-up 12 months after childbirth (N=43), 17 women participated in a semi-structured interview about their experiences and perceptions regarding their participation. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The data were analyzed using the Qualitative Analysis Guide of Leuven (QUAGOL) [5].

Results

Women participating in the intervention reported a high mean satisfaction score of 3.07 (SD-.156) on the CSQ-8. All interviewees reported a positive experience supported by content-related factors and the method of delivery. Content-related factors were: peer-support, openness to speak and reflection. Factors related to the method of delivery were: group features, benefits of online participation and flexibility. Several women reported that their subjective feeling of resilience had been enhanced through the intervention.

Discussion

Evidence was found for the feasibility of an online resilience-enhancing intervention for pregnant women. Participants emphasized the importance of peer-support and targeting perinatal mental health by creating the openness to speak about positive and negative emotions, thoughts and experiences throughout the perinatal period. This study is one of the few qualitative studies to date investigating how an online intervention can be implemented and can affect the mental health of pregnant women in a general healthy population. The development of the online resilience-enhancing intervention is based on a thorough development process inspired by the Behaviour Change Wheel Framework and the theoretical model of perinatal resilience. However, some limitations need to be considered. Our sample was limited to Dutch, Caucasian pregnant women with a higher educational degree. Secondly, only women who completed minimum two group sessions were invited for the postintervention interview. At last, partner's needs regarding perinatal mental health support were not directly investigated in this study.

Implications and future perspectives

Supported web-based interventions are a promising, cost-effective approach for promoting resilience and preventing the onset of mental health problems. Recommendations for future interventions were: a combined program with group sessions and resilience-exercises, extending interventions till at least 6 months postpartum and an integrated online platform.

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