

Mums4Mums

Mums from Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership Trust take part in telephone-based peer-support to help to reduce depressive symptomology in mothers experiencing postnatal depression

Postnatal depression (PND) is common and affects around 13 in every 100 women who have had a baby. Many women who experience PND in the UK go unsupported – especially those who feel unable to seek help, as well as those whose PND is not perceived to be sufficiently severe to warrant treatment.

PND can be disabling for the mother, and this can have a negative impact on the relationship between the mother and her baby, affecting the child's future behavioural and cognitive development.



A recent study conducted by the University of Warwick evaluated the effectiveness of telephone-based peer support for women suffering from

PND. The findings suggest that peer support can help reduce depressive symptomology, and at six month follow-up the intervention group had significantly lower depression scores compared with women who received usual services.

The participants felt their peer supporter was able to relate to their situation as a result of their own experiences of PND,

and as a result they felt more understood. They found their peer supporter to be effective and non-judgemental listeners, empathic, and genuine, which in turn made the support more accessible and acceptable to them.

People can sometimes be more inclined to accept support from individuals who they consider to be an equal, and the practical advice and coping strategies that peer supporters offer, could as such be an important means of supporting women who need additional help at this important time in their lives.

One mum said:

"I wasn't expecting a lot and I was kind of expecting a peer, from my past experience would respond the same way, you need to get over it and you need to get on with things so it wasn't what I expected, it was a lot better than what I expected"

This innovative way of working has proved beneficial to a small group of new mothers, and further research is now needed to assess the clinical and cost-effectiveness of telephone based peer-support for PND.

Professor Jane Barlow – University of Warwick

Mums4Mums was funded by the NIHR