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Evaluation of an advanced perinatal mental health program for midwives

By Rosalind Lau, Kay McCauley, Cheryl Moss, Maureen Miles and Wendy Cross

Perinatal mental health refers to the emotional wellbeing of women during antenatal and postnatal periods. Women in the perinatal periods are vulnerable to a range of mental health conditions including depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, substance abuse (Jones 2008), and the most common being depression. Perinatal mental health (PMH) conditions have negative consequences for women, their children and their families.

It is important for midwives to have the skills and abilities to screen women for PMH conditions, especially for depression. In 2012 the Department of Health Victoria tendered a project to prepare and deliver an Advanced Perinatal Mental Health Education program to assist maternity services across Victoria in implementing a consistent approach to routine depression

THE ETOS IS A SELF-REPORT QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGNED TO MEASURE THE CLINICIANS' LEVEL OF OPTIMISM RELATED TO THE PERCEIVED EFFECT OF THEIR INTERACTIONS WITH THEIR CLIENTS

screening of perinatal women.

The study evaluates the impact of an advanced PMH program (six modules, three days) on increasing midwives' self-efficacy, optimism and their knowledge to work with women with PMH conditions in Victoria. Midwives who attended the program completed the Elsom Therapeutic Optimism Scale (ETOS) and Self-Efficacy Scale (SES) 'mental health nursing'. The ETOS is a self-report questionnaire designed to measure the clinicians' level of optimism related to the perceived effect of their interactions with their clients (Elsom & McCauley-Elsom 2008). The SES adapted from the General Self-Efficacy Scale (Sherer et al, 1982) is designed to assess self-beliefs in coping with a variety of hassles in life (Sherer et al. 1982).

Midwives were sent Pre-ETOS and SES questionnaires electronically four to six weeks prior to the program. On the last day of the program, midwives completed the scales again along with a questionnaire related to the program modules. Seventy-eight midwives completed the pre and post ETOS and SES. The results showed that after the program, the mean post score for ETOS had increased by 4.39 and the mean post score for SES by 2.83. Despite the minimum increment in the post-test scores, they were in a positive direction. In addition, midwives who completed the program have significantly increased their perceived level of knowledge in PMH conditions. The program has the potential to increase midwives' perceived optimism, self-efficacy and knowledge demonstrating the positive impact of the education package.

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