



Abstract

Background: Perinatal mental disorders (PMD) occur during pregnancy or in the first year postpartum. PMD are very common and can severely harm the health of affected women and their children. These children are at risk of developing persistent mental disorders if their mothers are not treated appropriately. Though mental health care is covered by basic insurance in Switzerland, is available and widely used in the perinatal period, we do not know the extent of these services or their quality. To determine if they meet the needs of perinatal women with PMD, we must investigate service provision, including access and efficient care.

Aims: We seek fundamental knowledge that will allow us to understand requirements for accessing mental health service in the perinatal period in Switzerland. We will identify key factors that promote or hinder access to care, from both user and provider perspectives.

Methods: The qualitative study will consist of two complementary parts. In Part I we will conduct individual semi-structured interviews with 24 women who have had PMD, and ask them to share their experiences and perspective on factors that hindered or promoted treatment for their condition. We will stratify the sample by 4 clusters of ICD-10 F-diagnoses, covering a wide range of mental disorders. We will also stratify the sample into those who did and who did not receive mental health care before they were pregnant.

In Part II, we will conduct 3 focus groups (with 5-8 participants per group) with professionals from health disciplines, social care providers, and a health insurance company delegate with knowledge about perinatal mental health care. The semi-structured interviews will inform the focus group interviews, to introduce the user perspective. In both parts, we will be guided by Levesque et al's (2013) conceptual model for data collection and analysis.

Strengths, benefit and application: Our study will grow the evidence base needed to develop coordinated, efficient, patient- and family-centred care for women with PMD. We will be the first to investigate user and provider perspectives on perinatal mental health care in Switzerland. Earlier international studies were based on data collected with self-assessment instruments, and they concentrated on post-partum depression. We will instead base our results on ICD-10 diagnoses of mental disorder, so we can cover a wide range of PMD, including the most frequent and severe forms of the illness. Results from our study will be useful to those who develop inter-professional and interdisciplinary mental health care for PMD. It will create an evidence base for those who develop advance practice roles for nurses and midwives in perinatal mental health care. Finally, we will prepare the ground for a quantitative representative study in Switzerland.

Keywords: perinatal mental health, mental health care, barriers, facilitators, experiences