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Characteristics and Risk Factors of Women Referring to Community Psychiatric Services During Perinatal Period: A Pilot Study

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Introduction

Perinatal mental illnesses (PMIs) are common and can impact adversely both on maternal functioning and on fetal and neonatal outcomes. International guidelines and guidance suggest that women with severe mental illness or complex psychosocial problems required specialized care and services from general adult mental health service. Community Psychiatric Services (CPS) in Hong Kong are mainly designed for general adults. The risks and service needs of pregnant or postnatal women were dearth of study locally. A pilot study was carried out at the Personalised Care Programme (Kwai Tsing District) [PCP(KT)] since April 2015 for exploring the characteristics and risk factors of perinatal mental illnesses of pregnant or postnatal women referred to PCP(KT).

Objectives

1. To explore the characteristics and factors associated with increased risk of PMIs of those women. 2. To improve service delivery by specializing care for those women.

Methodology

Twenty-five women were newly referred to PCP(KT) from April to December 2015 when they were pregnant (n = 11) or postpartum within 6 months (n = 14). Twenty-two women (11 antenatal and 11 postnatal) completed initial assessment and were offered a pilot program specializing care for them. In addition to current PCP clinical assessments, Chinese Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (CEPDS) and diagnostic assessment interview were conducted for exploring client's characteristics and risks of PMIs.

Result

Near 60% were diagnosed as having adjustment disorders or anxiety disorders by psychiatrists while 32% were having severe mental illness (SMI) and 9% were having personality disorders or mental/behavioral problems related to substance misuse. Initial CEPDS screened that about 90% pregnant clients and 80% of postnatal clients were at risk of postnatal depression. Most of them had at least 5 factors associated with increased risk of perinatal mental illnesses. The most common factors that they had were psychological disturbance during pregnancy such as depression and

anxiety (91%), lone parent or poor couple relationship (86%), socio-economic disadvantage (73%), history of mental illness (64%) and low levels of social support (59%). Only 31% clients were supported by psychiatric treatment. Specialized community perinatal mental healthcare program offering psychological support, counseling and marital/family counseling may be helpful in improving mental health for these clients.