



A systematic mixed-methods review of interventions, outcomes and experiences for midwives and student midwives in work-related psychological distress



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ABSTRACT

Background: within challenging work environments, midwives and student midwives can experience both organisational and occupational sources of work-related psychological distress. As the wellbeing of healthcare staff directly correlates with the quality of maternity care, this distress must be met with adequate support provision. As such, the identification and appraisal of interventions designed to support midwives and student midwives in work-related psychological distress will be important in the pursuit of excellence in maternity care. **Objectives:** to identify interventions designed to support midwives and/or student midwives in work-related psychological distress, and explore any outcomes and experiences associated with their use.

Data sources; study eligibility criteria, participants, and interventions This systematic mixed-methods review examined 6 articles which identified interventions designed to support midwives and/or student midwives in work-related psychological distress, and reports both the outcomes and experiences associated with their use. All relevant papers published internationally from the year 2000 to 2016, which evaluated and identified targeted interventions were included.

Study appraisal and synthesis methods: the reporting of this review adhered to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. The quality of each study has been appraised using a scoring system designed for appraising mixed-methods research, and concomitantly appraising qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods primary studies in mixed reviews. Bias has been assessed using an assessment of methodological rigor tool. Whilst taking a segregated systematic mixed-methods review approach, findings have been synthesised narratively.

Findings: this review identified mindfulness interventions, work-based resilience workshops partnered with a mentoring programme and the provision of clinical supervision, each reported to provide a variety of both personal and professional positive outcomes and experiences for midwives and/or student midwives. However, some midwives and/or student midwives reported less favourable experiences, and some were unable to participate in the interventions as provided for practical reasons.

Limitations: eligible studies were few, were not of high quality and were limited to international findings within first world countries. Additionally, two of the papers included related to the same intervention. Due to a paucity of studies, this review could not perform sensitivity analyses, subgroup analyses, meta-analysis or meta-regression.

Conclusions and implications of key findings: there is a lack of evidence based interventions available to support both midwives and student midwives in work-related psychological distress. Available studies reported positive outcomes and experiences for the majority of participants. However, future intervention studies will need to ensure that they are flexible enough for midwives and student midwives to engage with. Future intervention research has the opportunity to progress towards more rigorous studies, particularly ones which include midwives and student midwives as solitary population samples

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Introduction

Midwives and student midwives experience both organisational and occupational sources of work-related psychological distress (Pezaro et al., 2015). Negative working cultures, a lack of staff support, bullying, burnout, uncaring behaviours, compassion fatigue and high staff turnovers have been observed in the midwifery profession (Begley, 2002; Douglas, 2011; Farrell and Shafei, 2012; Chokwe and Wright, 2013; Hall et al., 2016). This set of circumstances may hinder excellence in maternity care (The Royal College of Physicians, 2015; West et al., 2015; Hall et al., 2016).

The latest review of maternity services within the United Kingdom draws attention to the fact that midwives are more likely to report work-related stress than other healthcare professionals (Cumberlege, 2016). As such, it is becoming ever more pressing for research to identify and evaluate support interventions for the benefit of service users, the public and the midwifery profession as a whole.

Many have cited the need to identify efficacious interventions to support midwives (Curtis et al., 2006; Cameron et al., 2011; Sullivan et al., 2011; Kalicińska et al., 2012). However, it is not yet known what interventions are available, how effective they are, and how users experience them. Towards achieving this, a systematic mixed-methods review was performed with the main objectives being to identify interventions designed to support midwives and/or student midwives in work-related psychological distress, and explore any outcomes and experiences associated with their use.

Rationale

A more comprehensive understanding of the quality and outcomes of the literature on interventions designed to support midwives and/or student midwives in work-related psychological distress is required to establish a strong foundation for further research and understand the best evidence for the most effective interventions. Previous reviews of this type have not included either midwives and/or student midwives as an isolated study population sample (Awa et al., 2010; Regehr et al., 2014; Ruotsalainen et al., 2015; Guillaumie et al., 2016; Murray et al., 2016; Romppanen and Häggman-Laitila, 2016). Therefore, this review adhered to methodological standards to examine the literature on interventions designed to support midwives and/or student midwives in work-related psychological distress.

Objectives

The objectives of this review were to identify interventions that have been designed to support midwives and/or student midwives in work-related psychological distress and to explore any outcomes and/or experiences associated with their use. Meeting these objectives did not require control groups or any particular study type or study comparators, enabling a larger number of potential studies to be included.

The research questions addressed within this review are: (1) What interventions have been developed to support midwives and/or student midwives in work-related psychological distress? and (2) What are the outcomes and experiences associated with the use of these interventions?

Methods

The segregated systematic mixed-methods review design, as described by Sandelowski, has been employed (Sandelowski et al., 2006). This methodology is described as 'the design of choice' where a synthesis presents qualitative and quantitative findings separately. This method also allows the researcher to subsequently organise findings into a short line of argument synthesis, which provides a contemporary 'picture of the whole' (Noblit and Hare, 1988; Barnett-Page and Thomas, 2009).

Protocol and registration

The protocol for this review has been registered within PROSPERO, at http://www.crd.york.ac.uk/PROSPERO/display_record.asp?ID=CRD42016036978. This review has been reported in compliance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Moher et al., 2009). A detailed PRISMA checklist can be found in Appendix one.

Protocol registration number: CRD42016036978.

Eligibility Criteria

All independent, peer reviewed studies published in English between 2000 and 2016 were considered to reflect a more contemporary workplace.

All types of interventions and length of follow up were considered. Selected papers had to identify at least one intervention designed to support midwives and/or student midwives in work-related psychological distress. Any studies that met these criteria also had to report at least one outcome measure.

Participants/ population

This review defined the 'midwife' in line with the definition given by the International confederation of midwives' definition that a midwife is a person who has acquired the requisite qualifications to be registered and/or legally licensed to practice midwifery and use the title 'midwife' (ICM International Confederation of Midwives, 2011). Student midwives were included due to the fact that they perform midwifery work, experience similar work-related episodes and are the successors of the profession (Davies and Coldridge, 2015; Coldridge and Davies, 2017). Although it was recognised that student midwives effectively practise within a different role and may encounter different manifestations of work-related psychological distress, they were also considered by the research team to form a part of the midwifery workforce.

Intervention(s), exposure(s)

To be included, studies had to evaluate an intervention designed to support midwives and/or student midwives experiencing work-related psychological distress.

Psychological distress refers to a unique, discomforting, emotional state experienced by an individual in response to a specific stressor or demand that results in harm, either temporary or permanent, to the person (Ridner, 2004). Therefore, in line with this description, we defined work-related psychological distress as a unique, discomforting, emotional state experienced by an individual in response to a specific work-related stressor or demand that results in harm, either temporary or permanent, to the person.

Comparator(s)/ control

So that a larger number of potential studies could be included, studies were not required to include either a comparator or control group.

Outcome(s)

Primary outcomes

The identification of interventions designed to support midwives and/or student midwives in work-related psychological distress.

Secondary outcomes

Any quantitative and/or qualitative outcomes and/or experiences relating to intervention use were considered to be secondary outcomes.

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