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Student midwives' experiences in relation to assessment of maternal postnatal genital tract health: A case study analysis

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**Title**

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**Abstract**

**Objective:** to explore student midwives' experiences of postnatal genital tract assessment within midwifery preregistration curricula.

**Design:** a single, instrumental case study design was employed involving final year student midwives. Ethical approval was gained from the Higher Education Institution at the data collection site. Sampling was purposeful and data were collected using a survey (n=25); narrative style in depth interviews (n=11), review of programme documentation and a student midwife / researcher data workshop.

**Setting:** one Higher Education Institution in the north of England.

**Findings:** three themes were identified from the data analysis, awareness of assessment methods, accessing learning opportunities and actualisation of learning. The awareness theme highlights that most students were aware of potential signs and symptoms associated with genital tract assessment and health however; difficulties were identified concerning assessment of lochia, encountering sequential assessments and recognising potential for deterioration. This awareness was influenced by access to practice based learning opportunities. Access differed due to variation in postnatal provision, service pressures and variety in mentor practices regarding selecting and creating learning opportunities. This study suggests actualisation of learning and confidence in genital tract assessment was achieved when opportunities to integrate theory and practice occurred. Actualisation was hindered by limited allocation of curriculum time specifically for postnatal maternal assessment content and assessment strategies in comparison to other aspects of midwifery knowledge.

**Conclusions:** student midwives' experiences, awareness and learning actualisation varied in relation to the development of knowledge and confidence in maternal postnatal genital tract assessment. While clinical and theoretical learning opportunities were available, access and experience varied and limitations were identified. A number of recommendations are outlined to enhance the students learning experiences in practice and HEI settings, which address placement planning, mentor preparation, the student voice and supporting curricula documentation.

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