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5. Thesis title *

Rethinking postnatal care: A Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenological study of postnatal care in Ireland

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6. Abstract (up to 300 words) *

The postnatal period is an important and extremely vulnerable time for new mothers and their infants. Research has outlined the considerable extent of maternal physiological and psychological morbidity following childbirth. The underreporting and undiagnosed aspect of this morbidity has also been highlighted. Newborn infants are totally dependent on their needs being met and are also at risk of newborn conditions particularly if they are undiagnosed, for example neonatal jaundice. There is however, mounting evidence regarding the lack of postnatal support from health professionals, with women continuing to report their dissatisfaction with postnatal care. Research into postnatal care is pre-dominantly quantitative and clinically focused. Few empirical studies have examined the meaning women give to their postnatal care experiences. This research aims to generate a deeper understanding of the meanings, and lived experiences of postnatal care. In addition, it aims to reveal future possibilities to enhance women's postnatal care experiences. Initially, an in-depth examination of relevant literature is undertaken followed by a presentation of the process and findings from a qualitative meta-synthesis. An in-depth exploration of Martin Heidegger's biography and explication of his philosophy is then outlined. This research is a Heideggerian hermeneutical phenomenological study of Irish women's aspirations for, and experiences of, postnatal care. Purposive sampling is utilised in this research, which was undertaken in two phases. Phase one involved group interviews over three different time periods (between 28-38 weeks gestation, 2-8 weeks and 3-4 months postnatally), with a cohort of primigravid women and a cohort of multigravid women. The second phase involved recruiting two further cohorts of primigravid and multigravid women who participated in individual in-depth interviews over the same longitudinal period. In total nineteen women completed the study. Thirty-three interviews were held in total. The data analysis is guided by Crist and Tanner's (2003) interpretative hermeneutic framework. The women's aspirations/expectations for their postnatal care are represented through three interpretive themes: 'Presencing', 'Breastfeeding help and support' and 'Dispirited perception of postnatal care'. In addition, five main themes emerged from the data and capture the meanings the women gave to their lived experiences of postnatal care: 'Becoming Family', 'Seen or not seen', 'Saying what matters', 'Checked in but not always checked out' and 'The struggle of postnatal fatigue'. The original insights from this research clearly illuminate the vulnerability women face in the days following birth. A further in-depth interpretation and synthesis of the findings was undertaken. This philosophical-based discussion drew from the work of Heidegger (1962) and Arendt (1998). Engaging with these theoretical perspectives contributed to a new understanding about why some women within a similar context, have positive experiences of postnatal care while others do not. As such, the very nature that midwives and other postnatal carers are human beings has an influence on a woman's experience of her care. These carers, in their exposition of 'being' have the ability to demonstrate 'inauthentic' or 'authentic' caring practices. It is those who choose to be 'the sparkling gems' that are the postnatal carers who make a difference and stand out from the others. For the women in this study, their postnatal care experiences mattered. While some new mothers reported positive and meaningful experiences others revealed experiences which impacted unnecessarily. The relevance of these findings, recommendations and suggestions for future research are offered.

7. Keywords (max 4 keywords) *

Postnatal care, Women's lived experiences, Future postnatal care possibilities, Heideggerian hermeneutical phenomenology

8. Award (eg PhD) *

PhD

9. Date of award *

March 2012

10. University/Institution *

University of Central Lancashire

11. Consent *

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