The development and evaluation of a health promotion program for pregnant women aimed at addressing rates of caesarean section.

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Abstract

Introduction

A reduction in rates of caesarean section worldwide has been identified as a public health priority. Among a plethora of strategies aimed at addressing rising rates of caesarean section, few have explicitly involved information-based approaches for pregnant women. This thesis aimed to develop and evaluate a program for pregnant women designed to encourage informed decision-making for childbirth.

Methods

Due to the novel approach of the proposed program, this thesis adopted a methodology based on a four-stage program planning and evaluation cycle involving needs assessment, program planning, program implementation and process evaluation. A systematic literature review represented needs assessment and was carried out to identify strategies implemented globally to address rising rates of caesarean section. The program was then implemented with a sample of 131 pregnant women at a tertiary referral hospital in metropolitan Adelaide, South Australia. Process or ‘formative’ evaluation was carried out via a postnatal questionnaire to assess participants’ reactions to the program and to identify factors supporting or impeding the effectiveness of the program. The notion of a culture of caesarean section was also explored in the context of the broader program, by including sections in the questionnaire relating to women’s preference for caesarean section and views on community perceptions of caesarean section.
Results

On the basis of needs assessment, an information-based approach consisting of a peer support network and two pamphlets were developed to form the basis of the program. Prior to program implementation, resources were piloted with the involvement of key stakeholders including consumers, obstetricians and midwives.

Process evaluation found that women generally resisted engaging with the program, citing they felt resources to be irrelevant to their situation. None of the program participants utilised the peer support network. Women who had experienced childbirth previously and those of higher education were significantly more likely to read the pamphlets. While generally satisfied with pamphlet content, one in five women reported feeling distressed by some of the information.

Regarding the notion of a culture of caesarean section, the majority of women agreed with the existence of a community acceptance of caesarean section as easy, routine and convenient.

Conclusion

This thesis raises key issues regarding information-based approaches for pregnant women, aimed toward addressing caesarean section rates. Such approaches need to acknowledge the influence of external factors relating to both social and obstetric norms and values on women's decision making.