Re-configuring Identity Postpartum and Sustained Abstinence or Relapse to Tobacco Smoking

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Background

• For women who quit smoking for pregnancy risk of relapse postpartum is high[1]
• Risk factors include the physiological return of cravings, and stress, with smoking perceived as a coping response [2]
• Identity change may also be significant, as women adjust to a new mother identity, and simultaneously struggle to leave behind a smoker identity [2,3]

Methods

• Secondary qualitative analysis of data from the PReS Study, seeking views of pregnant and postpartum women (smokers and ex-smokers), their partners and health professionals (n=84)
• Data was analysed using a constructivist grounded theory approach, inductively coding
• Additional analysis of data from the Project HATCH study – a focus group study exploring the health behavior experiences of women in the postpartum period (n = 26)
• Inductive thematic coding within a theoretical framework of a life course narrative approach

Results and Conclusions

Emergent findings

Loss and Disruption

Integration of smoke free behaviour

Acceptance and Adaptation

I know I'm now giving my son the best chance possible

this is your new life and you want to continue this new life, you know, this new smoke-free life

in my drunk head, I'm like oh back in the day I used to be such a little lush and smoke fags. So in the end I'm like well this is what I do

Pre-pregnancy self

Your social life and doing stuff by yourself... before you were a mum

smoking it's the hardest thing to quit. It was really, really, really, really and it was a big part of my life (HATCH UK2)

can't leave the house because the baby's asleep, it's been screaming all day

Pre-pregnancy self

Acceptance and Adaptation

I know I'm now giving my son the best chance possible

this is your new life and you want to continue this new life, you know, this new smoke-free life

in my drunk head, I'm like oh back in the day I used to be such a little lush and smoke fags. So in the end I'm like well this is what I do

Results and Conclusions

• Analysis revealed loss as a central theme. Smoking for many was an integral part of their identity prior to parenthood, thus relapse was positioned as part of regaining the previous 'lost' identity
• 'Disruptions', such as the abrupt change to identity of new motherhood, or the shift from smoker to non-smoker, present challenges to the cohesion of identity

Implications and Recommendations

• Our analysis suggests interventions to support postpartum relapse prevention must critically include support for women in adjusting to a new identity as a non-smoking mother
• Interventions that do not acknowledge the struggle of managing disruption to the narrative flow of identity formation may be less effective
• Identity is co-constructed with others, and the role of social support, particularly partner support, must be considered as part of identity adjustment


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