Title: The Lived Experience of Pregnancy with Chronic Illness

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study is to explore and describe the experience of pregnancy with a chronic illness among women in the third trimester of pregnancy. The goal of this proposed project is to provide preliminary data on this specific population for further support for research. The rate of chronic illness among women in the United States is growing with as many as 39% of women of childbearing age (19-45 years) having a chronic diagnosis. With advances in treatment coupled with the recognition that women’s health care needs are different than those of men, women with chronic illness are living healthier lives. Care for chronic illness varies depending on the physiologic and psychological condition and symptoms. Living with chronic illness is often described as a process of constant integration within living with illness and living life. Two common symptoms expressed by women are underlying depression and fatigue. The presence or exacerbation of these symptoms are also known to affect perinatal outcomes during pregnancy. When there is a major life change, such as pregnancy, the balance of life and the stress of integration, may affect the overall well being of the mother and child that may result in symptom alterations. How these symptoms are affected by pregnancy and how women with chronic illness experience pregnancy is not well understood. Using a phenomenological research design, pregnant women with a history of an illness that has been treated for at a minimum of three months prior to pregnancy that is considered to be persistent, incurable and may worsen over time, will be enrolled from the Vincent Obstetrical Service at MGH. After consent, the women will participate in an open ended tape recorded interview on the experience of pregnancy with a chronic illness. Interviews will occur in a private setting of the participant’s choice. Data will be analyzed using Colaizzi’s methods with themes extracted and defined and an exhaustive description of the phenomenon created. This description will then be confirmed with additional participants. Data collection and analysis will be concurrent to ensure deeper understanding of emerging themes. Trustworthiness of these data will be maintained within the research process by obtaining a purposeful sample till saturation of themes is achieved. Rigor of validity of data will be maintained by the PI and an expert in qualitative research analyzing these data for agreement. Creditability will be ensured by member checking the analysis with participants. The expected outcome is an exhaustive description of the lived experience of women with chronic illness and the identified themes that resonate within their lives during pregnancy.