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STUDENT PROFILE



Caroline Lafarge

Course
PhD Psychology

Year completed
2016

Title of thesis
Women's experience of coping with termination of pregnancy for fetal abnormality: coping strategies, perinatal grief and posttraumatic growth

In her thesis, Caroline examined women's experiences of coping with termination of pregnancy for fetal abnormality (TFA). Research had shown that TFA can have negative psychological consequences for women. However, little is known about the way women cope with TFA, the potential for growth following TFA or health professionals' understanding of women's coping with this event. This is despite research pointing to the potential relevance of these concepts in the context of TFA. Caroline's thesis aimed to further our understanding of women's experience of coping with TFA by: 1) exploring women's coping strategies when dealing with TFA, 2) examining the relationship between coping and psychological outcomes (defined as perinatal grief and posttraumatic growth; and 3) investigating health professionals' perceptions of women's coping to identify any discrepancies between health professional's perceptions and women's experiences.

The research indicates that despite using mainly 'adaptive' coping strategies (support, acceptance and meaning attribution) women's levels of grief were high. Moderate growth was observed in several areas: 'relating to others,' 'personal strengths' and 'appreciation of others'. Several coping strategies were associated with better psychological adjustment. In particular 'acceptance' and 'positive reframing' predicted lower levels of grief and 'positive reframing' predicted higher levels of growth. The research also shows that health professionals have a valid understanding of women's short-term coping strategies but limited insights into their long-term coping processes. This points to a deficit in aftercare, an issue raised by women participants.

The research makes a number of contributions to the body of knowledge on coping with TFA and how coping relates to women's psychological adjustment. It also gives an empirical basis to the potential for growth following TFA. Lastly, it provides insights into health professionals' understanding of what coping with TFA may involve for women and its limitation. The research also has important practical implications as the findings provide an evidence base to support the optimisation of care that women receive when undergoing TFA. In particular, the research calls for the development and implementation of a psychological intervention to support women post-TFA, underpinned by the deficiency in aftercare and the high levels of distress evidenced in the research. A psychological intervention based on cognitive behavioural techniques, which aims to promote acceptance and event reframing, may be beneficial for women. It may help minimising women's levels of distress whilst promoting the experience of growth.

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Supervisors:

Professor Kathryn Mitchell and Pauline Fox

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