

Pregnant women and midwives are not in tune with each other about dietary counseling

- Studies in Swedish antenatal care

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Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för avläggande av filosofie/medicine doktorsexamen framläggs till offentligt försvar i Aulan, Vårdvetarhuset, Umeå universitet fredagen den 18 september, kl. 13:00.
Avhandlingen kommer att försvaras på svenska.

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**Department of Public Health and Clinical
medicine and Department of Nursing**
Umeå universitet/Umeå University
Umeå 2015

Organization

Umeå University
Department of Public Health
and Clinical Medicine
Department of Nursing

Document type

Doctoral thesis

Date of publication

28 August 2015

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Title

Pregnant women and midwives are not in tune with each other about dietary counseling – studies in Swedish antenatal care.

Abstract

Background During pregnancy, a healthy diet is beneficial for the expecting mother and her fetus. Midwives in antenatal care have an ideal position for promoting a healthy diet and thereby help women to not only lower the risks of pregnancy complications and adverse birth outcomes, but improve maternal health. The overall aim of this thesis was to describe diet and dietary changes during pregnancy from the women's and the midwives' perspectives with a focus on dietary counseling. The thesis comprises four studies. The specific aims in the respective studies were to: I) Describe pregnant women's attitudes to and experiences of dietary information and advice, as well as dietary management during pregnancy. II) Explore midwives' strategies in challenging dietary counseling situations. III) Describe how midwives' perceive their role and their significance in dietary counseling of pregnant women. IV) Describe women's food habits during pregnancy and up to six months postpartum. **Methods** Studies I-III were qualitative. Study I included focus group interviews with 23 pregnant women. Study II included telephone interviews with 17 experienced midwives working in Swedish antenatal health care. Study III included the same 17 interviews from study II and supplemented them with four face-to-face-interviews. Qualitative content analysis was performed in all three studies. Study IV was a longitudinal study including a quantitative analysis of a questionnaire, which was given to women at five occasions during and after pregnancy. It concerned their food habits and it was answered by 163 women. The quantitative data was analyzed using comparative and descriptive statistics. **Results** The overall findings of the thesis were summarized as the main theme "Pregnant women and midwives are not in tune with each other about dietary counseling". The main theme included the two themes 'Pregnant women are concerned about risks for their child but fail to change to healthier dietary habits over time', and 'Midwives view themselves as authorities, though questioned ones'. In subthemes it was highlighted that pregnant women are well informed and interested in risk reduction for their child's best and that they try to do their best to improve their diet during pregnancy. However, their diet did not reach levels of healthy eating recommendations and became even unhealthy after pregnancy. It was also highlighted that midwives experienced insufficient knowledge in dietary issues and related risks and that they had difficulties to give dietary support to pregnant women. Midwives were found to mainly focus on giving information and they lacked sufficient competence for challenging counseling. **Conclusion** Pregnant women, on the one hand, experience a lack of support from the midwives when dealing with dietary changes. The midwives, on the other hand, feel exposed and express a need for both further education in dietary issues and training in counseling. Women's food habits during, but in particular after pregnancy need improvement, and dietary counseling could be more focused on healthy eating in a long-term perspective.

Keywords Pregnancy, food habits, dietary counseling, counseling strategies, woman-centred care, antenatal care, qualitative methods, longitudinal studies, food frequency questionnaire.

Language

English

ISBN

978-91-7601-294-9

ISSN

7601-294-9

Number of pages

113 + 4 papers