

Asking about depression and anxiety in pregnancy. What do women of refugee background think?Contact: jacqueline.boyle@monash.edu

Background: Up to 1 in 5 women feel depressed or anxious when pregnant or after having a baby. Women of refugee background may be more likely to be at risk of depression and anxiety in pregnancy because of hardship, violence and loss. The Australian guidelines recommend asking every woman about her emotional health in pregnancy. Asking in early pregnancy can help find women who need support. But not all women are asked in all hospitals.

In 2016, we started asking women questions about how they were feeling. We did this the first time they came to see a midwife at the hospital. Women used an iPad to answer the questions. We translated the questions into different languages. Some women needed an interpreter to help them. Then the midwife spoke with women about their answers. Any woman who had signs of being sad or worried was asked if she would like to speak to another health care worker who could help her with her emotional health.

Aims: We wanted to know how women felt about being asked these questions and about speaking to the midwives about their emotional health.

Methodology: We spoke to 22 women from 4 different refugee and migrant groups. We read the interviews many times. We found common ideas and thoughts.

Results: All women said that being asked about emotional health was important. They liked being asked about how they were feeling. They liked being able to talk with the midwife about how they were feeling. Many women said it was the first time anyone had asked them about their emotional health. Women felt cared for and supported.

Women's experiences

Could talk about emotional health with the midwife.

Would suggest other women in their community do screening.

They liked doing the screening in their own language. It was more private and encouraged more honest answers.

Some women liked having something to do when in the waiting room.

Other women felt doing the screening in the waiting room was difficult. They needed the interpreter to help. They worried other people would hear their answers.

What women said about getting help for emotional health

Many women said that if a woman needs help, she should ask for help.

Women do not get help because of shame and dishonour. They cannot speak the language. They do not want to take help. They ignore problems. They do not want to share problems. They think extra help cannot solve problems.

Women suggested it would be good to have a health care worker at the clinic who was expert in helping with emotional health problems. It would help women who were worried about someone finding out they were getting help for emotional health. Because you could visit this health care worker at the same time you saw the midwife.

Suggestions for improving emotional health care for pregnant women

Every women said being able to listen to the questions on the iPad would be very helpful.

What this means for the future

Knowing what women value and what they want changed will help us make emotional health care in pregnancy better for all women.

We did another study and found women who were asked about their emotional health in pregnancy were more likely to report signs of being sad or worried than women who were not asked about emotional health in pregnancy.

Women were also more likely to have extra checks because they were asked about their emotional health.