

Exploring and developing a longitudinal cohort study of babies born within Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland: The Lockdown Babies Study

SUMMARY

Diba, P., Divers, A., Scott, R., Crow, R., Johnson, C., Chatzimladi, E., & Newbury-Birch, D.

“They say it takes a village to raise a baby and we couldn't see anyone or do anything”.

Purpose of Project:

The overarching aim of the research project is to utilise a co-production approach to ascertain the impact of lockdown on parents giving birth during the pandemic, and any perceived impact on their babies, in Middlesbrough and Redcar & Cleveland.

Aims and Objectives:

In addition to the primary objective stated above, this project has the following aims and objectives. Those in bold below are addressed in this report. The remaining objectives are covered in the complementary report (Divers *et al.* 2022):

1. To ascertain what routinely collected data is collected is available in relation to wellbeing and service use of the child and parents/carers for the first five years of life.
2. To explore data protection and governance issues in relation to the collection of routinely collected data.
3. **To develop a survey of parents of babies born during lockdown (03/2020-03/2021) ascertaining the impact of lockdown on the mental health of parents and any perceived impact on their babies.**
4. **To set up an advisory group of parents/carers who will provide recommendations for a longitudinal cohort study.**
5. **To carry out in-depth interviews with 15-20 parents/carers to ascertain their views on the impact of COVID on their babies and their families.**
6. **To carry out up to 10 focus groups/interviews with individuals involved in data relating to babies/child wellbeing.**
7. To develop a protocol for a longitudinal cohort study.

Methods:

To ensure that the aim and objectives of the study were met, the research team utilised several quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. A mixed-methods approach was utilised in the research project, comprised of two different data gathering phases: namely the online survey (Phase One) and the focus group/interviews mentioned above (Phase Two).

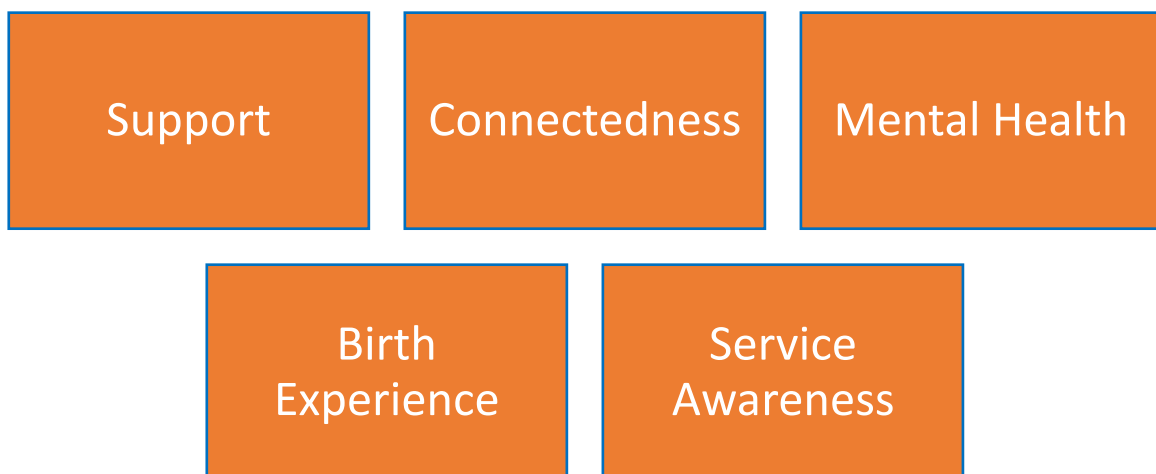
Phase One Findings:

Having analysed the data from the online survey, a number of areas emerged which helped to shape some of the areas for closer examination in the next phase of research:



Phase Two Findings:

Both interviews and focus groups yielded some incredibly deep, and at times, stark conversations - particularly from the parents who relayed their experiences as parents/carers during lockdown. These conversations formed the following themes, each of which are explored in further detail below.



Recommendations:

From the conversations with both parents and professionals, a number of recommendations – in consultation with the *Lockdown Babies Advisory Group* – have been formed:

There is a need for large-scale engagement with parents and families of babies born 'in lockdown' to gauge their levels of need. The impact on the mental health and wellbeing of mothers who have experienced significantly traumatic births is a particular area in which more understanding is needed.

Special attention needs to be paid to key developmental stages of babies born in lockdown to build an accurate picture of need.

Additional workplace support should be made available for professional staff who may be experiencing emotional fatigue from situations encountered as part of their role.

It is essential that missed opportunities to provide nutritional support to babies are ameliorated and any supplemental support that may be required due to these missed opportunities is made readily available.

In order to fully support those who require it, it is essential that there is a clear understanding of what services are available and the exact nature of those services.

A concerted effort to find out more about the disconnect between professional and patient accounts of pandemic experiences should be undertaken.

Any effort to organise efforts to remediate the impact of the lockdown on babies and families must include the involvement of experts by experience in the strategic direction of those efforts.