A different way of being: the influence of a single antenatal relaxation class (ARC) on maternal psychological wellbeing and childbirth experiences: an exploratory sequential mix-method study.

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"A Different Way of Being"

The Influence of a Single Antenatal Relaxation Class (ARC) on Maternal Psychological Wellbeing and Childbirth Experiences

An Exploratory Sequential Mix-Method Study

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BACKGROUND

Perinatal mental health problems are prevalent, have a wide range of adverse effects on the mother and her child, and are predictors of negative childbirth experiences. Therefore, improving perinatal mental health is a global public health priority and developing services that could promote it must be a priority for maternity services. There is growing evidence that antenatal education incorporating hypnosis or guided imagery may have the potential to promote perinatal mental health and positively influence childbirth experiences. However, there is a paucity of high-quality research in the field.
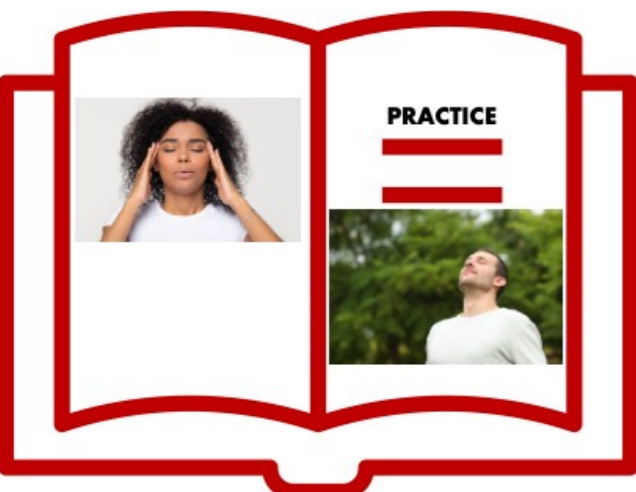
ARC: A single 3-hour NHS antenatal class including;

PHYSIOLOGY
Fight & flight response during labour
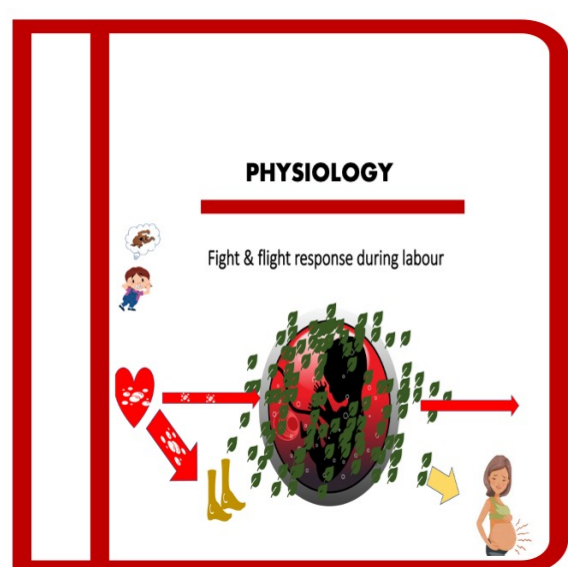
Theory of the physiology of stress response versus relaxation response, Fear-Tension-Pain theory, and hormonal systems in childbirth.

STORIES

Positive birth stories collected from previous ARC participants.

PRACTICE

Practice of four relaxation exercises including breathing, visualisation, hypnosis, and relaxation in labour
Handouts and audios for further **practice at home**

AIM

To explore the influence of ARC on maternal psychological wellbeing and childbirth experiences

DESIGN

Exploratory sequential mixed method

METHOD

Phase 1

A descriptive qualitative study, using semi-structured individual (8 women) and joint (9 couples) interviews to **understand**
(a) 'what' aspects of maternal psychological wellbeing and childbirth experience may be influenced by ARC.
(b) 'how' and 'why' any influence may occur.

Phase 2

An observational study using a prospective longitudinal cohort design that recruited 91 childbearing women. Surveys were used to:
(c) **test** the **significance** of any influence (identified in Phase 1) **over time** (from pre-class, to 2 weeks post-class and 4-8 weeks post-birth) in a **larger sample.**
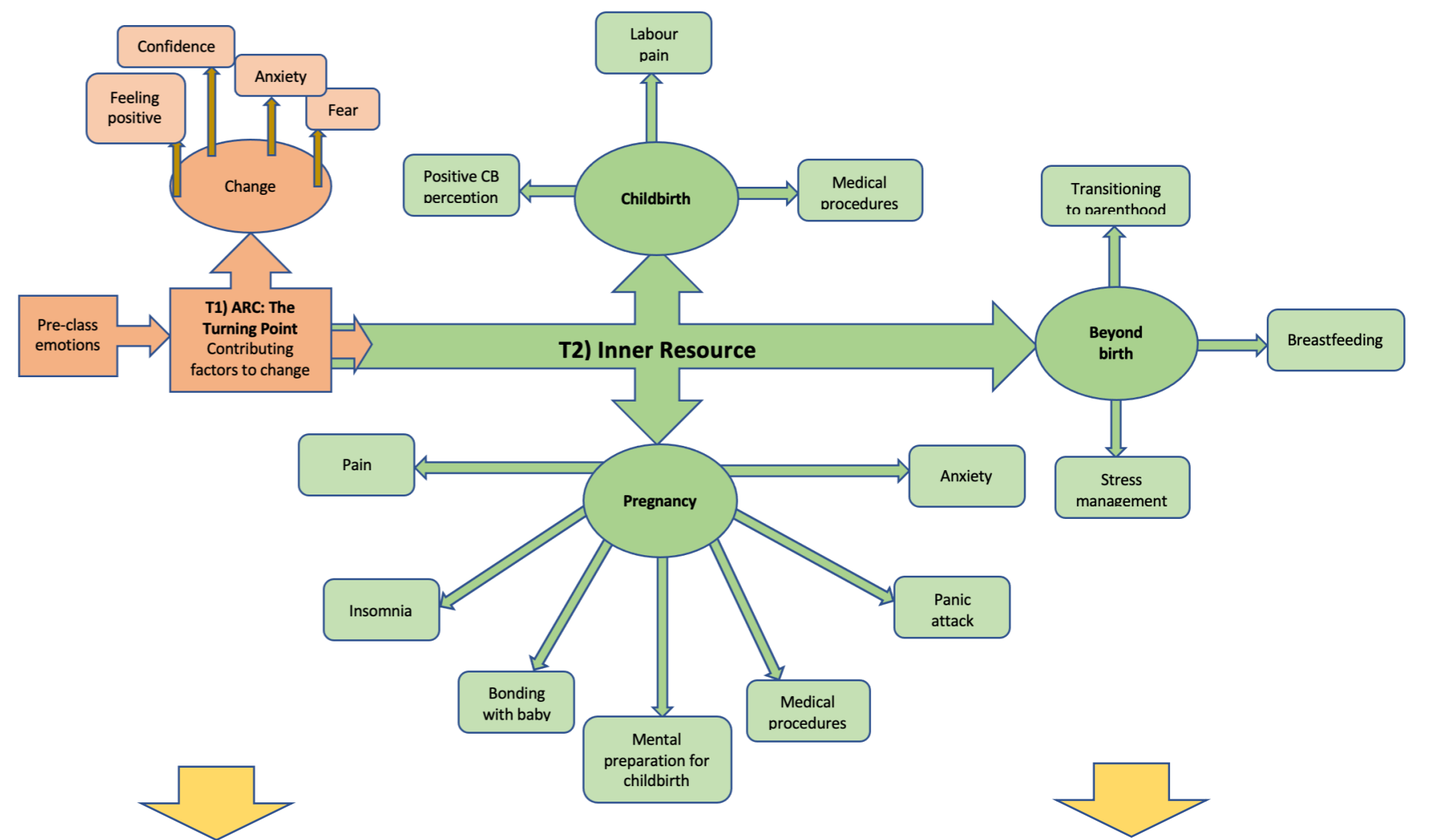
ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY ABERDEEN

Edinburgh Napier UNIVERSITY

THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND AUSTRALIA

FINDINGS

Phase 1
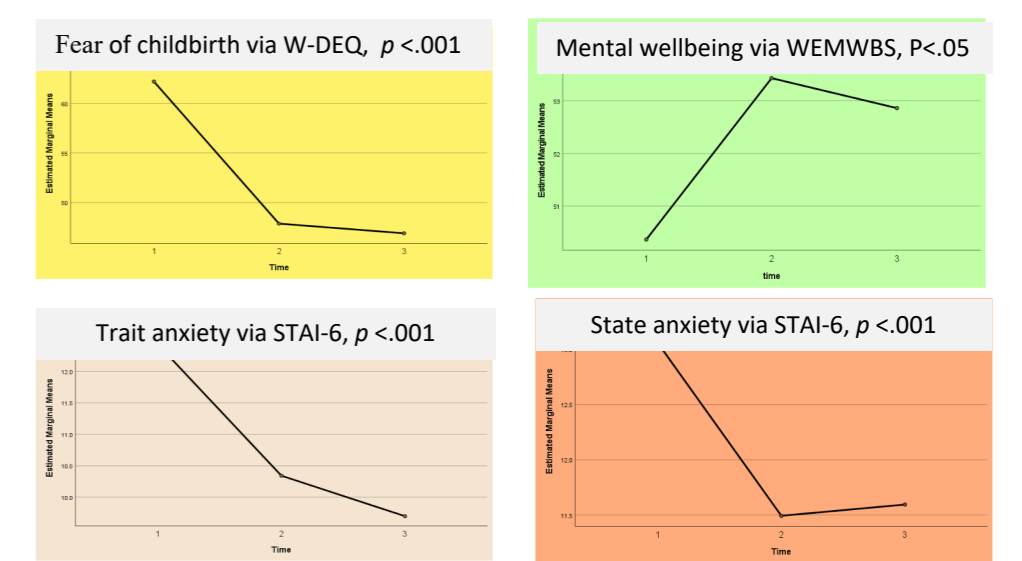
Theme 1: ARC, a turning point

Theme 2: Recognition of an inner resource

Development of 3 Hypotheses (*H*) and 4 Research Questions (*RQ*) for Phase 2

Phase 2

H1: There was a significant improvement in **mental wellbeing, fear of childbirth,** and **state and trait anxiety** at post-class, which remained stable until post-birth.

Fear of childbirth via W-DEQ, *p* <.001
Mental wellbeing via WEMWBS, P<.05
Trait anxiety via STAI-6, *p* <.001
State anxiety via STAI-6, *p* <.001

H2: There was a significant increase in **childbirth self-efficacy** expectancy at post-class but not in outcome-expectancy.

P = .000   *P* = 0.135
Via CBSEI
Self-Efficacy Expectancy   Outcome Expectancy
Pre-class   Post-class
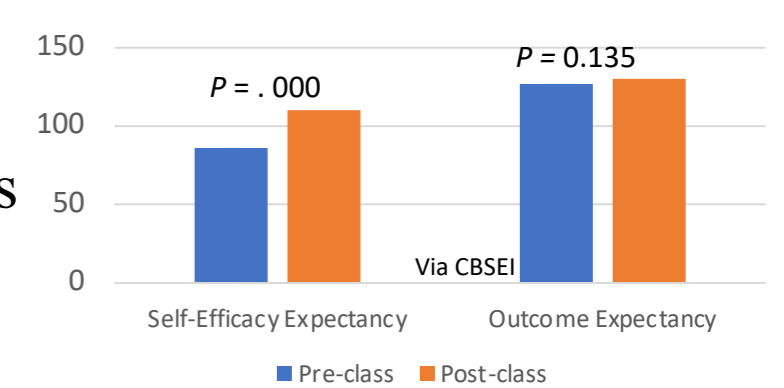
H3: There was a significant reduction in intended **use of epidural** after the class, and the actual use of it during labour.

P = .000
Pre-class   Post class   Post birth
No   Yes/Maybe
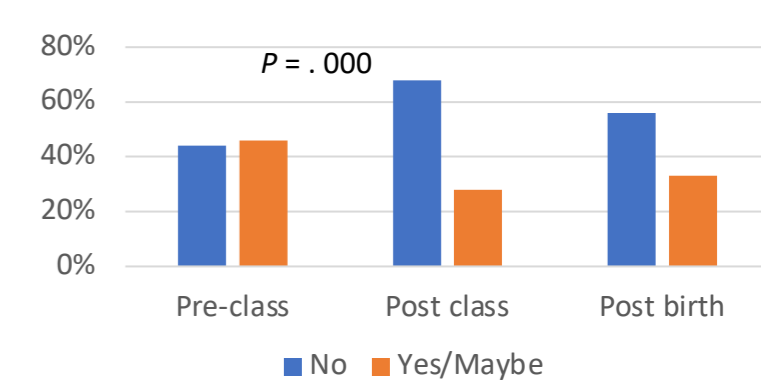
RQ1: Women attending ARC **widely used** the ARC techniques during pregnancy (95.2%) and childbirth (94%).

In pregnancy   In labour & birth
Used ARC techniques
Not used ARC techniques
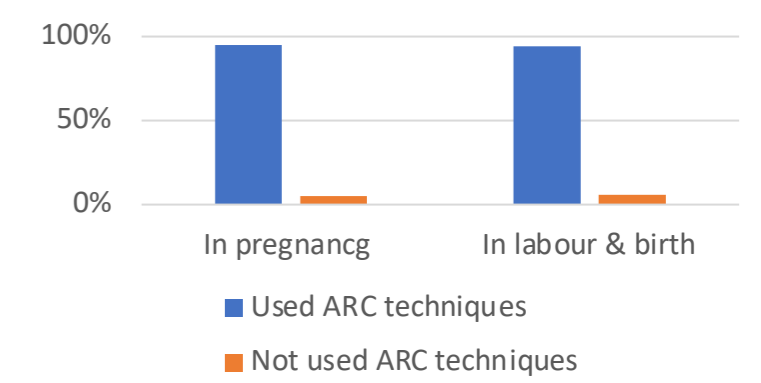
RQ2: Women perceived ARC as **positively influencing** their experiences of pregnancy (97.6%) and childbirth (84.6%).

Pregnancy   Labour and birth
Very positive · Positive · No influence
Negative · Very negative
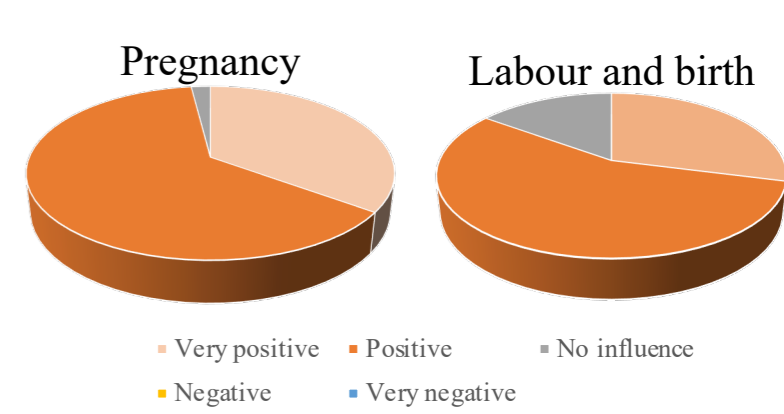
RQ3: Majority (63.4%) of women whose labour started spontaneously, **sought hospitalization** in established labour, with 11% arriving at hospital in 2nd stage of labour.

Not in established labour...
In established labour 63.6%
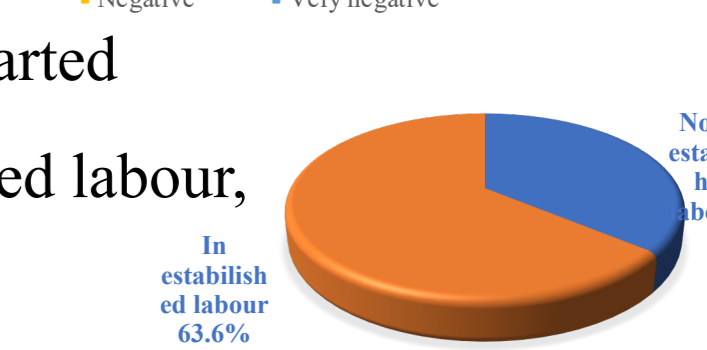
RQ4: Majority (74%) of women perceived their overall labour and **birth experience** as positive.

Neither negative nor positive 17%   Negative   Very positive 32%
Positive 42%
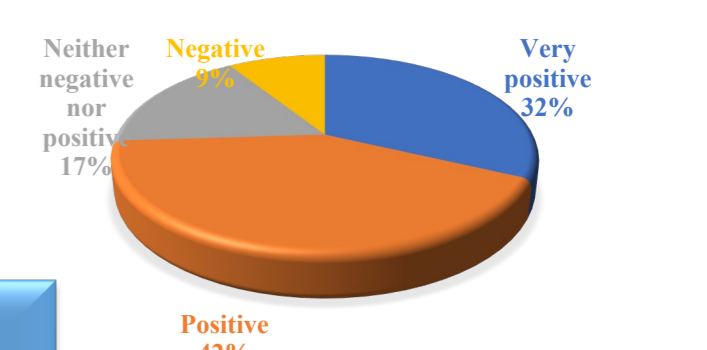
CONCLUSION

Attending a brief antenatal relaxation class was associated with improved maternal psychological wellbeing and childbirth experiences. Maternity services should consider reforming current antenatal education in line with this evidence.

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