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Understanding the use of research evidence in practice: the support given to breastfeeding women by community midwives and health visitors

Introduction

This study explores how knowledge from research is perceived and used in relation to other kinds of knowledge in practice. This is explored from the perspectives of clients, midwives and health visitors within the context of breastfeeding help and support.

Methods

Observation of interactions between either community midwives or health visitors and breastfeeding women and in-depth, semi-structured interviews with both health professionals and women were conducted.

A detailed analysis of both field notes and interviews was carried out. Domain analysis was used initially to gain an overview of the concepts and to produce a framework for analysis and coding was carried out using NVivo software. Diagrams were used to map out categories within concepts, to see linkages between them and to adjust coding.

Findings

The knowledge and experiences of both women and health professionals will be presented. For women these experiences included building up confidence to care for a new baby and learning to deal with uncertainty. Breastfeeding was seen in the context of motherhood and included ideas about being a 'good mother'.

Health professionals valued the kind of knowledge that came from remembering women's experiences. Knowledge from research was used in conjunction with other kinds of knowledge but was never accepted unconditionally. Health professionals attempted to offer women information in a way that they felt would make the information more acceptable and easier for them to understand.