A Week In Your Life
Behaviours of young mothers from areas of deprivation; implications for health promotion and cancer prevention

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Background & aim

• Young mothers are at higher risk of engaging in cancer-causing behaviours eg. smoking, poor diet & lack of physical activity\(^1\)

• Research often focuses on their children, or groups them into a ‘young person’ category, ignoring the complexities of young motherhood\(^2\)

• To develop interventions to change young mothers’ health behaviours, we need to understand their everyday experiences

• We aimed to understand the everyday lives of young mothers from their perspective
  • to identify barriers, & facilitators, of healthy behaviours
  • to explore implications for health promotion & cancer prevention

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1. Imamura et al., 2007; Letourneau et al., 2004; Wardle et al., 2003; Evans, 2010
2. Sydor, 2013; Bonevski et al., 2014
Methods

Photo creation
• 1 disposable camera; 1 week – ‘photos of things that matter to you’, document a typical week in their life

Photo elicitation & focus group 1
• Photographs used to initiate discussion, identify key features of everyday life, focusing on health choices & behaviour – Photographs WERE NOT data

Analysis 1
• Single site & comparative analysis, emergent themes, barriers & facilitators

Focus group 2
• Agreement of themes & interpretation, further exploration

Analysis 2
• Final analysis & conclusions
Subject characteristics

- 27 young mothers
  - Belfast: 9, Bristol: 13, Middlesbrough: 5
- Aged 16 – 24
  - All 15 – 20 at time of first pregnancy
- Recruited from areas of deprivation
  - Primarily from Children's Centres & local charities
Personal perception of health

- Understanding of ‘what it means to be healthy’

- Unanimously agree they are not healthy
  - Unfeasible; everyday pressures, lack of time, cost of food

Interviewer: How would you describe health?

Jade: When I think of healthy I think of eating fruit & doing exercise whereas that’s just not the reality in my life
Health related behaviours: diet

- Poor diet
  - Lack of time to cook, cost of ingredients
  - Easily available takeaway, daily consumption is a normal activity
  - Lack of cookery skills or knowledge

Neave: *It actually kills me to make a healthy dinner because you see by the time you buy all your stuff for a healthy dinner, you could have had two takeaways, that’s what way I think of it!*

Robyn: *They are all saying ‘eat healthy’ but it’s too dear!*
Health related behaviours: alcohol

• Some of the women rarely drank alcohol
  – Cost, time, lack of childcare

• Those who did, often binge drink & felt isolated when unable to drink with peers

Kaylee: If I go out to a bar & I see a drink & I think God I could buy a packet of baby wipes or a packet of nappies with that so I hate going out & spending money on drink when you could buy him stuff with it...

Daisy: I really struggle, like, because we are young we are expected to go out & party & get drunk. Sometimes I’m like ‘I just want to be normal, I just want to go out & get drunk’
Beliefs about cancer & its causes: behaviour

- Many suggested developing cancer was out of their control

- Some highlighted potential cancer causing behaviours
  - But this was often followed by anecdotal stories to discredit this

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*Emma: My aunty last year died of a brain tumour; she was a complete fitness freak, she hardly drank, she didn’t smoke, she’s never smoked, she ate real healthy, she was a proper fitness freak & she died of a brain tumour*
Beliefs about cancer & its causes: prevention messages

- Misunderstanding & mistrust around cancer prevention messages

Amy: If it’s that bad, then why do the shops sell it?

Interviewer: So, do you think the advertising overstate the risk?

Amy: They do it so extreme that you just think, “No, it’s not…” Like that’s not actually what’s going to happen… like they say every time you have a drag of a fag you mutate like. [Laughter] If you did that you’d be like proper mutated by now, wouldn’t you. Like, you’d be dead by now if you’d mutate that much
Conclusions

• Need to consider social & environmental context when developing health promotion campaigns & cancer prevention interventions

• Lack of funds, time, childcare, availability of unhealthy alternatives – huge barriers to health behaviours

• Facilitators identified by women – social media, commercial weight loss programmes, cookery skills, local social support: community centres

• Clearer understanding of links between behaviour & cancer needed, current health promotion messages are not clear & not trusted

• Targeting these attitudes & behaviours could have multigenerational impact
Acknowledgements

• Cancer Research UK

• Dr Kimberly Jamie (Durham University, UK)
  • Dr Roisin O’Neill (Queens University Belfast, UK)

• Rhona Beynon (University of Bristol, UK)
  • Hannah Bows (Durham University, UK)

• Women who took park in the research

Thank you…. Any questions?
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