Group Clinical Supervision for midwives

Midwives are leaving the profession, many of them at the beginning of their careers. A trial of Group Clinical Supervision is underway in Australia to see if it makes a difference to burnout, perception of workplace culture and midwives' intention to leave.

Midwives are pivotal to the wellbeing of women and their babies. Indeed, there is an urgent global call to upscale midwifery to address the rates of women and babies who are injured or die in childbirth. However, in Australia, similar to other high-income countries, there is another type of crisis occurring that we can no longer ignore - midwives in significant numbers are leaving the profession.

We know that midwifery provides a 16-times return on investment (Sandall et al, 2016: UNFPA, 2021). However many midwives are feeling demoralised, disempowered, and overwhelmed. Some of the reasons for this are an over-medicalisation of the workplace, a lack of autonomy and under-staffing (see this article). These factors are leaving midwives emotionally fragile and feeling unsupported by their managers (Catling & Rossiter, 2020; Hunter et al, 2018; Pezaro et al. 2016).

Blogs such as 'midwife diaries' are heartbreaking to read and confirm the results of the Work, Health and Emotional Lives of Midwives (WHELM) study (Hunter et al, 2018). The WHELM study surveyed the wellbeing of nearly 2000 midwives in the UK and found significant levels of emotional distress, burnout, stress, anxiety, and depression. Two thirds of participants stated that they had thought about leaving their profession in the last six months, and alarmingly, early career midwives were over-represented in those leaving (Harvie et al, 2019).

Australian research echoes findings about midwives who have left the profession (Matthews, 2021), along with similar findings about work-related distress (Creedy et al, 2017; Catling & Rossiter, 2020). A Royal College of Midwives document *Why midwives leave – revisited* (2016) reported that 88% of midwives who had left the profession might consider returning if there were appropriate staffing levels. Eighty percent of midwives said they would return if their workplace culture was changed for the better, although this report did not outline what a positive workplace culture was. These data are UK-based, but similar issues are being faced by Australian midwives.

How can we support midwives?

Clinical Supervision is a well-known supportive strategy that has been used in many health disciplines to help promote staff professional development and health and wellbeing. Associate Professor Christine Catling gained a National Health and Medical Research Council investigator grant to investigate whether Group Clinical Supervision makes a difference to Australian midwives and the midwifery workplace culture. We know Clinical Supervision reduces burnout from observational studies, but it has not been studied

extensively and experimentally before in the midwifery discipline. For more information on what Clinical Supervision is please go to the Australian Clinical Supervision Association site here: http://clinicalsupervision.org.au/

The trial of Group Clinical Supervision

The cluster randomised controlled trial (for maternity units in Greater Sydney) will involve 12 maternity sites (the 'clusters'). Each cluster will be randomised to either receive the intervention (Group Clinical Supervision) or not.

The trial will measure midwifery burnout rates (using the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory) (Kristensen et al, 2005), the perceptions of their workplace culture (using the Australian Midwifery Workplace Culture (AMWoC) tool (Catling et al. 2020), and intentions to leave the profession. For the intervention sites, the efficacy of the Clinical Supervision will be measured through using the Clinical Supervision Evaluation Questionnaire (CSEQ) (Horton, 2008). Data on the numbers of midwives exiting the organisation and rates of sick leave will be collected. Please see this study protocol for more information (Catling et al., 2022).

The results of this 5-year study are forthcoming. Watch this space.

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