

Parenting Preterm Multiples: Exploring the lived experiences of parents of preterm multiples.



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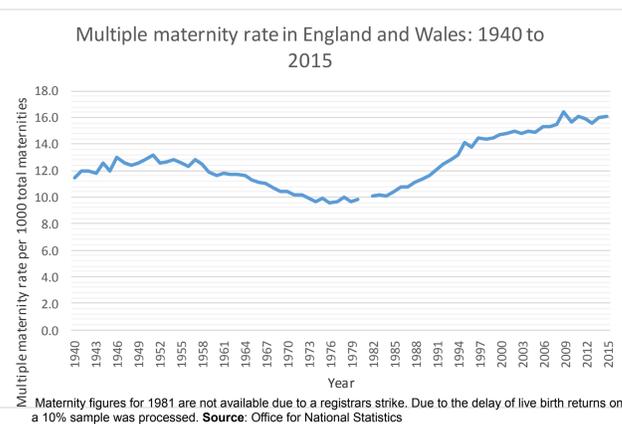
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Introduction

In the UK the number of multiple births has shown a general upward trend and this is attributed to an increased birth rate, increased maternal age, assisted conception and advances in medical practice enabling more multiples to survive (NICE, 2011; Tamba, 2013; HFEA, 2015; ONS, 2016).

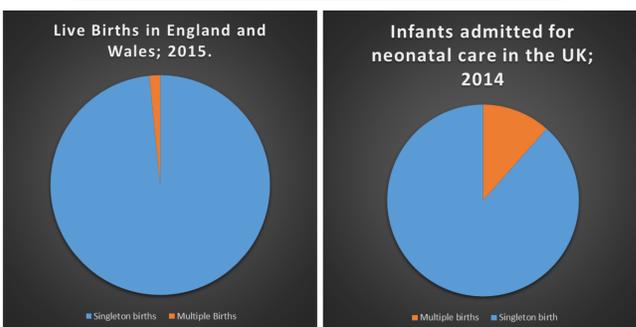
Over 50% of twins and almost all triplets are born prematurely (<37 weeks gestation). In the U.K multiple births account for 11.5% of all admissions to neonatal units, despite only making up 1.6% of all live births (Neonatal Data Analysis Unit, 2015).

Both multiple birth and prematurity are associated with poorer short and long term outcomes and both can significantly affect the lives of children and their families (WHO, 2016; Bryan, 2003).



Prematurity is the biggest cause of adverse neonatal and infant outcomes among multiples compared to singletons (NICE, 2011). Having a baby on a neonatal unit can be an incredibly stressful and emotional time for parents (Cleland, 2015). Parents of preterm babies are at significantly higher risk of postnatal depression than parents of full term, healthy babies (Carson et al, 2015) and are often unable to access additional support (Bliss, 2015).

There is insufficient literature regarding the impact of multiple birth on parents, particularly when born preterm, and health professionals require a greater understanding of parents' needs in order to respond in a sensitive and appropriate manner (Jenkins and Coker, 2009; NICE, 2011).



Aims of the research

- To explore the lived experiences of parents of preterm multiples, some of whom may require specialist neonatal care, and the additional complexities faced by the parents.
- To develop a deeper understanding of the impact that the premature birth of multiples has on parents and their social networks.
- Explore and establish the differences experienced by parents of multiples born preterm when compared with parents of term multiples.



Method

The primary aim of this research is to develop a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of parents of preterm multiples. Grounded Theory, an interpretive method of enquiry, has been selected as the most appropriate method as this allows for a deeper exploration of the phenomena (Charmaz, 2006), revealing insight into the personal experiences behind complex issues experienced by parents of preterm multiples. Grounded theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 who defined it as the discovery of theory from systematically obtained data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

A constructivist grounded theory approach will be used to obtain relevant narratives from parents, establish an understanding of parents' experiences of raising multiples and 'give voice' to their perspectives (Charmaz, 2006). Inductive reasoning will allow the identification of common themes and the tentative formation of hypotheses (Charmaz, 2015).

Overview

The study will consist of 2 phases, with the possibility of a 3rd phase at 12 months corrected age. Each phase will explore the lived experiences of parents of preterm multiples, with the aim of better understanding the needs of parents, challenged with the additional complexities which preterm birth and parenting multiples may bring. The parents will be recruited from a large NHS Trust in the West Midlands. A combination of semi-structured and photo-elicitation interviews will be used to obtain relevant narratives.

Sampling and recruitment

A stratified purposive sampling technique will be employed to obtain responses relevant to the area of interest (Harvey and Land, 2017) and capture variations which may influence the manifestation of the phenomena (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Parents will be recruited with the support of the specialist midwife in antenatal clinic at the proposed study site. Information regarding the study will be given to all mothers expecting multiples during their appointments at antenatal clinic from 20 weeks gestation. This will allow parents time to consider their participation, seek clarification and ensure that their consent is fully informed.

Inclusion criteria:

- Parents of twins, triplets or higher order multiples.
- Co-habiting couples.
- Both parents to take part in an interview in English.

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews will be employed to explore how the preterm birth of multiples impacts on parents' expectations prior to birth; parental relationships; relationships with family and friends; family dynamics; finances and physical and mental health and how these change over time. A topic guide comprising key questions will be used to ensure that all areas of interest are covered. Interviews will be audio-recorded and conducted either in hospital or the participant's homes. The parents will be interviewed together to establish a greater insight to their dyadic parenting experiences (Morgan, 2012).

Photo elicitation

The use of visual images in qualitative health research has been used to investigate diverse phenomena, and there is a consensus that combining images and text can produce valuable insights and generate greater understanding (Pink, 2001; Marsh et al, 2016). Phase II of the study will involve follow up photo elicitation interviews at 16 weeks following the babies discharge from hospital. Participants will be invited to take one photograph each week of topics they feel are significant to the preterm birth of their multiples during the time their babies are in hospital and for 4 weeks following the babies' discharge.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis will be used to identify, analyse and interpret emerging themes within the collated data (Harvey and Land, 2017).

Data analysis software will be used to support the analysis, coding and comparison of the data and to establish the significance of emergent themes.

Ethics

Ethical approval for the proposed study will be sought from Birmingham City University Faculty of Health Ethics Committee and the NHS research and development department at the proposed study site.

Informed consent will be obtained from participants before each phase of the study.

Outcomes

It is hoped that the proposed research will:

- Provide insight into parents' experiences of parenting multiples.
- Enable parents to more successfully prepare for and overcome the challenges posed in the early years of parenting preterm multiples and in doing so help to improve the long-term outcomes for children and families.
- Inform the practice of healthcare professionals.

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