

Spring 2023

Pregnancy and the Effects of Mental and Physical Support from Others

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Author Note

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Abstract

This service learning project researched and provided an online support group for women in which pregnancy, postpartum and other motherhood topics were discussed. Often women don't have the support they need during pregnancy, especially from those that have experienced what they have. I created an online support group through Facebook and was able to reach a total of thirty-eight women. The link to this support group was shared through social media, word of mouth and discussed with my female patients. The blog included mental support, exercises for women and example meal plans.

Keywords: Pregnancy, motivation, mental support, physical support.

Section 1: Introduction to your Capstone Project

There were a few ideas that I had on my mind when developing this project. The connection and draw to this one came from my own personal experience in which I wanted to help others who have either gone through the same thing or plan to in the future. I knew that I wanted to help other women throughout the pregnancy, postpartum and motherhood journey. Choosing the service learning project was the best way that I found to connect to these women and really make an impact on the community. As a woman and as a mom to be who is expecting, I am proud to say that I was able to not only make a difference in these other women's lives but my own as well.

At the beginning stages and brainstorming phase of this project, I was just barely thirteen weeks pregnant. I was feeling sick, tired and very unmotivated. As my body was changing everyday I wasn't sure how to handle it. The amount of times I would Google "is _____ normal," I don't think I could count. This is where the idea sparked and I knew that I had to connect with other mothers. I was inspired to create a safe space for other women to come to discuss the beautiful and not so beautiful things about pregnancy, postpartum and motherhood. I knew that mothers don't usually have a lot of time to themselves and getting to in-person groups would not be ideal for them, so an online platform would be the best. According to The Mayo Clinic the benefits of online groups include: more frequency participation, opportunities for people who may not have local face-to-face support groups, and a degree of privacy or anonymity (Mayo Clinic, 2023). And this is when the idea of a Facebook support group began to form.

Section 2: Elements coming together

As an expecting mother, I had a pretty good perspective on the project and the idea. But, I wanted to dive further into that and include my knowledge and background with pelvic floor health and physical therapy as well as information from OBGYNs and women who have gone through pregnancy and motherhood already as they have the best information available. My innovative approach to provide support and bring this information was to have it easily accessible in an online platform that most people in the world already have access to and may even use on a daily basis, Facebook. I researched and read blogs on both Facebook and other online platforms to prepare to deliver this information in the best way to grab the attention of the readers and members and to also keep it.

An important aspect of this project was to consider the emotional intelligence of my stakeholders. I needed to have the ability to communicate with these women, even without meeting them in person. All women are different and all women's pregnancy/postpartum journeys are different. Discovering a way to discuss topics while understanding the emotional component that can come along with these things was a challenge but a vital part of this project. If the only perspective was coming from me and my experiences during pregnancy there would be a lack of inclusivity due to the differences amongst the members. For example, I could not assume that each member has had the same symptoms or experiences as me during pregnancy such as morning sickness, lack of motivation and/or food aversions. I had to discuss my experiences while also asking questions in a way that would get honest and in depth answers but would not provoke unwanted emotions or thoughts of myself or one another. I wanted to create a safe space for women to come for support where they felt comfortable.

During the time of this project, I was able to use my already understood knowledge of pregnancy and postpartum, especially that of pelvic floor rehabilitation. Not only did I use my professional knowledge as a physical therapist assistant to deliver important information to members about pelvic floor health during and after pregnancy as well as for overall well being as a woman, I researched and used my access to other rehabilitation sources to discover even more information. I also collaborated with other health care professionals including my own OBGYN who also refers patients to me for pelvic floor rehabilitation. Not only did I discuss pelvic floor rehabilitation but many other topics that came to mind as I collaborated with others.

The ultimate goal of this project was to provide support and information to women during their pregnancy and postpartum period to make it the best experience possible for them. A lot of women lack support and information during these times and I wanted it to be easily accessible for them. Research shows that struggling with mental health during pregnancy can impact a baby's development including neurological and fetal heart rate (Scheinost et.al, 2017). I feel as if I was able to reach a number of women and improve their overall mental health and motivation throughout pregnancy and other aspects of a woman's life. With the use of an innovative online platform, I was able to reach more women than I would have been able to in an in person setting due to the availability of the information and easy accessibility.

Section 3: Results

To measure the impact and results of this project, I created a survey discussing the overall impact that this group had on the members. The link to the results of this survey is provided in the appendix. It included five question which are listed below:

1. How satisfied were you with the information provided in this group on a scale of 1-5?

2. What was your favorite information presented?
3. How likely are you to continue with this group?
4. Would you recommend this group to others?
5. Do you feel like the information provided helped guide you to a better pregnancy, postpartum, motherhood or womanhood journey?

After reviewing the responses, it was very clear that this project benefited the stakeholders in a big way. Each answered survey question showed that the group was very helpful and beneficial for them. I also measured the success of this group with the interactions that were received throughout. Each post and/or informational guide received comments and/or likes. Each comment from the members contributed to the conversation and allowed for other members to see perspectives that weren't just mine.

Section 4: Conclusion

Due to me being a first time mom, I did not anticipate the amount of members that I had in this group. I expected women to want information to be provided by someone more experienced. But, as I was able to do more research and provide information that was actually interesting and useful along with the perspectives of the other members of the group, I feel as if I gained respect and a following. I have created relationships through this online platform that I will cherish and continue to benefit from and after seeing the results, I know that the other members will too.

Throughout this project, I was always thinking about things that I could have done differently or how I could have made it better. After having a personal discussion about the idea and my innovative approach to it with the medical assistant to my OBGYN, she stated that

“women supporting women, especially during pregnancy, postpartum recovery and motherhood is hard to come by. This will be beneficial and helpful to all of those involved (K. Silvis, personal communication, March 29, 2023).” With this, I feel happy and accomplished and know that I not only benefited all of the stakeholders but myself as well.

Appendix

Support Group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/522492066698262/>

Survey Results:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/stories/SM-a7CYR_2BJqgvnY4lGx_2BgnEKQ_3D_3D/

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