

# The development and validation of a screening scale for antenatal anxiety



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## Background:

Anxiety in pregnancy is estimated to affect approximately 15% of women and is as common as depression. Significant clinical antenatal anxiety is one of the strongest predictors of postnatal depression and can impact negatively on subsequent child behavioural, emotional and cognitive development.

Consequently, it is crucial to promote the recognition and management of anxiety disorders in pregnancy, as this can impact on the prevention of postnatal depression and improve child development outcomes. Recent reviews highlight the lack of anxiety measures with sound psychometric properties for screening use with pregnant women. A short and reliable questionnaire would be highly valuable, assisting midwives and other health professionals, to recognise when women would benefit from further support and appropriately targeting mental health interventions.

This study is funded by the Scottish Government Chief Scientist Office and is part of a Doctoral Training Fellowship awarded to Mr. Andrea Sinesi. The project is based at the NMAHP Research Unit, University of Stirling in partnership with Maternal Mental Health Scotland and NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde.

## Aims and Objectives:

The main aims of this research study are:

- To develop a screening tool specifically devised to detect significant anxiety during pregnancy
- To determine the screening accuracy of this new screening measure and compare it to the anxiety scale currently recommended by NICE to screen for antenatal anxiety (GAD-2 / GAD-7).

## Methods:

The research is a mixed-method study and will benefit from the involvement of diverse stakeholders, including women with experience of anxiety in pregnancy and perinatal mental health professionals.

### *Development of a new screening measure for antenatal anxiety*

- A systematic review of questionnaires used to assess anxiety symptoms in pregnant women is currently being carried out. This review will examine the psychometric properties of anxiety measures when used with pregnant populations and identify core constructs and specific questions for potential inclusion in the new scale.
- Semi-structured qualitative interviews will be conducted with women with experience of antenatal anxiety in order to identify factors useful in identifying clinically significant antenatal anxiety.
- Consensus methods will also be used to reach agreement among experts in perinatal mental health in relation to the questions that will be included in the questionnaire.
- A pilot study will be conducted to test a preliminary version of the screening tool on a sample of 50 pregnant women.

## *Psychometric validation of the new measure*

The final version of the new anxiety measure and the measures currently used to screen for anxiety in antenatal care (GAD-2 / GAD-7) will be assessed against a reference standard (a structured clinical interview conducted by a mental health practitioner) to examine their case-detection ability in a sample of pregnant women. 200 participants will be recruited from antenatal clinics in Glasgow. The discriminative accuracy (i.e. the ability to distinguish between true positives and true negatives) of the new anxiety measure, the GAD-2 and the GAD-7 will be calculated.

### **Implications:**

Identifying women who present with significant levels of anxiety during pregnancy is the first, crucial step in order to provide them with an appropriate level of support.

This research aims to equip midwives and other health professionals with a safe, effective and easy-to-administer screening tool for antenatal anxiety.

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