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# Women's Experience of Nausea and Vomiting in Pregnancy.

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## BACKGROUND

- Pregnant in 2007 – vomiting throughout the day up to 5 months. Fainted in the street and taken to A&E, told that I was dehydrated.
- March 2010 – read Brian Swallow’s article about NVP in ‘The Psychologist.’
- Read more about NVP - ‘gender politics’
- Made contact and decided to expand his interview study.
- Aim- to gain a glimpse into the participants’ lived experience of NVP.



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## Brian's pilot study

- Pilot study with 4 women interviewed throughout pregnancy. Have also included quotations from other research where appropriate.
- Five themes
  - Isolation and support
  - Confusion and mental health
  - Guilt
  - Nausea
  - Food and odours



## Isolation and lack of support

“I feel that I could have been treated earlier if my doctor had responded appropriately to my expressed concerns about the severity and impact of the nausea and vomiting I was experiencing.”

“I was just told I had to put up with it”

“There isn’t any support from public health sector. They don’t understand why you’re in tears and begging for help.....”

“Sometimes I’ve felt that it’s not been taken seriously as an illness and more of some fatty thing pregnant women moan about. Practical advice about how to cope with it and take care of older children is non existent.”

- Unable to feel legitimately sick.
- Women with supportive family rate physical and mental health more positively



## Confusion and mental health

“I was just told I had to put up with it”

“My doctor said it is because I am anxious”

“It had a huge detrimental effect on me, particularly I couldn’t focus on work and ultimately I believe contributed to very severe post natal depression which was diagnosed when my baby was 5 weeks old. I believe, with hindsight, my depression started in pregnancy because I felt so awful and was just continually told, never mind, that’s normal”

•NVP appears to be a significant factor in both ante and post natal depression (Bozzo et al, 2006)



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## Guilt

- Unable to prepare food
- Not able to play with children
- Being a burden on partner and family





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## Experiences of Nausea

“It is like nothing else I have experienced”. It feels like my whole stomach is coming up”.

“It is relentless”.

“I just wish I could be sick. I am sure it would be better than this constant nausea”.





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## Food and odours

“any smell makes me want to vomit. Even the smell of Alex (her son)”

- Cannot prepare food
- Cannot tolerate food smells in the house
- Better to prepare food outside the home



## Recruitment

- Announcement for participants to take part in a study looking at the experience of NVP was placed on the web site of Pregnancy Sickness Support Trust.
- Twenty-four women contacted me.
- Nine had previously had HG.
  
- 10 were currently suffering from HG - interviewed
- 5 were currently suffering from NVP (not hospitalised) - interviewed



## Analysis

- Method – Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).
- Qualitative methodology.
- Focus is on the experiential rather than the experimental.
- Helps participants to expose and express their feelings.
- Researcher attempts to make sense of the experience and illuminate the experience using psychological knowledge and theory.

## Preliminary findings

Theme 1) 'Have you tried ginger?' – lack of understanding of what going through.

- Anger and frustration
- Loneliness
- Disassociation from the 'morning sickness' experience

Theme 2) Impact of HG

- Body
- Life
- Relationships
- Identity

## ‘Have you tried ginger?’- anger and frustration

- The total lack of understanding from others made the women feel angry and frustrated:

‘It really winds me up when people ask if I have tried ginger, they just don’t understand what I am going through.’ – Leila

‘Suggestions to take ginger get me so angry, do they really understand what this is about, if you did, there is no way they would expect ginger to help.’ – Isabella

‘No, you don’t understand [taking about people who suggest ginger], it is not going to go away with a bit of ginger.’ – Mary

## ‘Have you tried ginger?’- Loneliness

- ‘I didn’t want to see anyone, it was too hard to explain what I was going through.’ – Isabella
- ‘I’ve decided to lower my expectations of others....so it means I don’t see my friends.’ – Kathleen
- ‘I prefer not to see anyone.’ – Fran
- ‘Unless you have actually felt it, it’s hard to communicate it. I don’t actually think that there is word for the feeling yet. I don’t think we have the language to describe it.’ – Isabella.
- ‘It’s not that people are being mean, you just feel misunderstood, lonely I suppose.’-Mary

## 'Have you tried ginger?' -Disassociation from the 'morning sickness' experience

- 'I used to read descriptions of morning sickness and try to apply it to me but I couldn't. This metallic taste, I couldn't apply it, my tongue felt like it was rotten.' – Isabella.
- 'People would say 'oh, I had that', no you didn't! This is not just a bit of sickness, this is ruining my life, I'm debilitated, were you?' – Janet.
- 'How can people compare this to morning sickness, just come inside my body for 1 minute and see if this is morning sickness.' - Leila



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## Impact of HG - Body

- ‘I didn’t know if I was alive.’ – Isabella talking about the first trimester.
- ‘I would rather die than brush my teeth.’ –Leila
- ‘It’s like caring for an elderly person.’ – Janet talking about her husband.
- ‘ I feel quite vulnerable.’ – Fran
- ‘I’ve lost so much weight and I am so weak.’- Cath
- ‘I feel so smelly..my lips are dry and cracked all the time.’ - Leila



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## Impact of HG -Life

- ‘It is such a big change to your life to have months out of control. You suddenly have to get someone else to do all of the things you do, you can’t go to work, you can’t look after your child, you can’t look after your house, you can’t do any shopping or cooking, then you need someone to look after you...I need to be cared for, I can’t even go downstairs to get myself water. I’m just totally dependent on others.’ - Janet



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## Impact of HG - Relationships

HG impacts on relationships with partners, friends, family and healthcare professionals.

- ‘I couldn’t see friends, it has cut off all social interactions.’ – Janet
- ‘I find it very hard to be touched’ [by husband] – Leila
- ‘I came away in tears, he was so dismissive... Cath talking about the time she asked her GP if he could give her anything.

## Impact of HG- Identity

- The women have assumed a negative sense of self, feeling helpless and a failure, aspects of the self that they don't normally relate to.
- 'It makes me feel like wimp.....normally I'm quite healthy and have good willpower.' – Mary
- 'This is not me.' – Leila
- ' I feel pathetic and I'm not usually like that.' – Janet
- 'I can't look after him [son] which made me feel like a failure and so guilty about it.' - Fran



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## What have we done with this evidence?

- Been used to train our volunteers who work for the support network.
- Adapt our online coping material and evaluated it.
- Conduct a small study to understand the partner's experience.
- Go back to the interviews and look in-depth at the experience of seeking medical care. To be published in Midders.



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## Conclusion

- These quotes put a voice on the experience of HG.
- HG is relatively under-researched, therefore we have a limited language to describe it. This analysis helps to give a name to the experience.
- HG is a debilitating condition for which women (and their families) need support and care.