

Concealed Pregnancy & Neonaticide: A changing knowledge base.

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This paper presents a critical review of the literature in relation to concealed pregnancy and neonaticide. Concealed pregnancy is a complex phenomenon and a significant public health issue which has implications for the health and wellbeing of women and their babies. The impact of concealment on maternal-infant attachment is unknown and recurrence may be a feature in future pregnancies. Further more serious risks for the infant may include newborn abandonment and neonaticide. Neonaticide may occur in response to intense emotional distress, fear and shock following many months of concealment. Recent high profile cases of concealment and neonaticide will be used as context to assist in the exploration of this issue. This paper will also explore judicial responses to neonaticide following concealment.

A systematic search of the literature was performed using the Cinahl, PsychArticles, PsychInfo and PubMed databases using “concealed pregnancy”, “denied pregnancy” and “neonaticide” as key words from the years 1990-2013. Websites hosting professional guidelines were reviewed and the grey literature was searched using Index to Theses. A thematic analysis of these papers will be presented which identify the links between concealed pregnancy and neonaticide.

A critical review of the literature and thematic analysis has identified that a clear link exists between concealed pregnancy and neonaticide. The literature indicates that women who conceal their pregnancies experience fear, emotional isolation, panic, denial and dissociation. Neonaticide may be an impulsive response rather than a premeditated act of aggression. In addition relational and cultural factors may impact on an individuals’ behaviour. Safeguarding children is important, however it is essential that women are not viewed as offenders when they are concealing their pregnancies. Care pathways and supportive services for women who choose to conceal their pregnancies are essential. Understanding the concept of concealed pregnancy and its’ association with neonaticide is important for developing research, healthcare policy and maternity and infant services.

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