

## Research Briefing

### “Anxious and traumatised”: user’s experiences of maternity care in the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic

Julia Sanders and Rebecca Blaylock

This study forms part of the [WRISK Project](#), a collaboration between [BPAS](#) and Cardiff University.

#### Background

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, National Health Service (NHS) maternity services were pared back to the minimum level considered to be required to keep women and their babies safe.

The aim of our study was to understand the impact of COVID-19 public health messaging and pandemic-related service changes on users of maternity care in the UK during the pandemic.

#### Methods

We conducted an online survey, inviting women who had experienced pregnancy after the 11<sup>th</sup> March 2020, whether or not they were still pregnant, to take part. We collected data between June and September 2020.

#### Key Findings

We found that women adopted a precautionary approach and were happy to socially distance in the context of a relatively unknown virus. However, they were also acutely aware of the negative impacts.

“I understand the importance of social distancing, and I have remained at home throughout lockdown... yet I haven't even been able to meet with my immediate support network (parents) which has been hugely upsetting and distressing during what should be a happy time for us.”

Responses to the survey showed that changes to maternity services caused unintended negative consequences including:

- Missing essential clinical appointments
- Confusion over public health advice
- Distress and emotional trauma for women

Not only did women report feeling antenatal care was inadequate, they also felt isolated and sad in the postnatal period. Survey respondents expressed frustration and upset due to a lack of staff to help them care for their new baby.

#### Conclusions

COVID-19 restrictions have resulted in women feeling their maternity care was insufficient and has come at great emotional cost to users.

With growing evidence of the impact of the virus on pregnant women, a more nuanced and evidence-based approach to caring for women during a pandemic must be prioritised. Maternity services should ensure clear communication and provide safe face to face care where possible.

#### Read the paper

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.midw.2021.103069>