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A systematic mixed-methods review of interventions, outcomes and experiences for midwives and student midwives in work-related psychological distress

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A systematic mixed-methods review of interventions, outcomes and experiences for midwives and student midwives in work-related psychological distress

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ABSTRACT

Background: within challenging work environments, midwives and student midwives can experience both organisational and occupational sources of work-related psychological distress. As the wellbeing of healthcare staff directly correlates with the quality of maternity care, this distress must be met with adequate support provision. As such, the identification and appraisal of interventions designed to support midwives and student midwives in work-related psychological distress will be important in the pursuit of excellence in maternity care.

Objectives: to identify interventions designed to support midwives and/or student midwives in work-related psychological distress, and explore any outcomes and experiences associated with their use.

Data sources; study eligibility criteria, participants, and interventions This systematic mixed-methods review examined 6 articles which identified interventions designed to support midwives and/or student midwives in work-related psychological distress, and reports both the outcomes and experiences associated with their use. All relevant papers published internationally from the year 2000 to 2016, which evaluated and identified targeted interventions were included.

Study appraisal and synthesis methods: the reporting of this review adhered to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. The quality of each study has been appraised using a scoring system designed for appraising mixed-methods research, and concomitantly appraising qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods primary studies in mixed reviews. Bias has been assessed using an assessment of methodological rigor tool. Whilst taking a segregated systematic mixed-methods review approach, findings have been synthesised narratively.

Findings: this review identified mindfulness interventions, work-based resilience workshops partnered with a mentoring programme and the provision of clinical supervision, each reported to provide a variety of both personal and professional positive outcomes and experiences for midwives and/or student midwives. However, some midwives and/or student midwives reported less favourable experiences, and some were unable to participate in the interventions as provided for practical reasons.

Limitations: eligible studies were few, were not of high quality and were limited to international findings within first world countries. Additionally, two of the papers included related to the same intervention. Due to a paucity of studies, this review could not perform sensitivity analyses, subgroup analyses, meta-analysis or meta-regression.

Conclusions and implications of key findings: there is a lack of evidence based interventions available to support both midwives and student midwives in work-related psychological distress. Available studies reported positive outcomes and experiences for the majority of participants. However, future intervention studies will need to ensure that they are flexible enough for midwives and student midwives to engage with. Future intervention research has the opportunity to progress towards more rigorous studies, particularly ones which include midwives and student midwives as solitary population samples.

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Introduction

Midwives and student midwives experience both organisational and occupational sources of work-related psychological distress (Pezaro et al., 2015). Negative working cultures, a lack of staff support, bullying, burnout, uncaring behaviours, compassion fatigue and high staff turnovers have been observed in the midwifery profession (Begley, 2002; Douglas, 2011; Farrell and Shafiei, 2012; Chokwe and Wright, 2013; Hall et al., 2016). This set of circumstances may hinder excellence in maternity care (The Royal College of Physicians, 2015; West et al., 2015; Hall et al., 2016).

The latest review of maternity services within the United Kingdom draws attention to the fact that midwives are more likely to report work-related stress than other healthcare professionals (Cumberlege, 2016). As such, it is becoming ever more pressing for research to identify and evaluate support interventions for the benefit of service users, the public and the midwifery profession as a whole.

Many have cited the need to identify efficacious interventions to support midwives (Curtis et al., 2006; Cameron et al., 2011; Sullivan et al., 2012; Kalicińska et al., 2012). However, it is not yet known what interventions are available, how effective they are, and how users experience them. Towards achieving this, a systematic mixed-methods review was performed with the main objectives being to identify interventions designed to support midwives and/or student midwives in work-related psychological distress, and explore any outcomes and experiences associated with their use.

Rationale

A more comprehensive understanding of the quality and outcomes of the literature on interventions designed to support midwives and/or student midwives in work-related psychological distress is required to establish a strong foundation for further research and understand the best evidence for the most effective interventions. Previous reviews of this type have not included either midwives and/or student midwives as an isolated study population sample (Awa et al., 2010; Regehr et al., 2014; Ruotsalainen et al., 2015; Guillaumie et al., 2016; Murray et al., 2016; Romppanen and Häggman-Laitila, 2016). Therefore, this review adhered to methodological standards to examine the literature on interventions designed to support midwives and/or student midwives in work-related psychological distress.

Objectives

The objectives of this review were to identify interventions that have been designed to support midwives and/or student midwives in work-related psychological distress and to explore any outcomes and/or experiences associated with their use. Meeting these objectives did not require control groups or any particular study type or study comparators, enabling a larger number of potential studies to be included.

The research questions addressed within this review are: (1) What interventions have been developed to support midwives and/or student midwives in work-related psychological distress? and (2) What are the outcomes and experiences associated with the use of these interventions?

Methods

The segregated systematic mixed-methods review design, as described by Sandelowski, has been employed (Sandelowski et al., 2006). This methodology is described as ‘the design of choice’ where a synthesis presents qualitative and quantitative findings separately. This method also allows the researcher to subsequently organise findings into a short line of argument synthesis, which provides a contemporary ‘picture of the whole’ (Noblit and Hare, 1988; Barnett-Page and Thomas, 2009).

Protocol and registration

The protocol for this review has been registered within PROSPERO, at http://www.crd.york.ac.uk/PROSPERO/display_record.asp?ID=CRD42016043978. This review has been reported in compliance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Moher et al., 2009). A detailed PRISMA checklist can be found in Appendix one.

Protocol registration number: CRD42016043978.

Eligibility Criteria

All independent, peer reviewed studies published in English between 2000 and 2016 were considered to reflect a more contemporary workplace.

All types of interventions and length of follow up were considered. Selected papers had to identify at least one intervention designed to support midwives and/or student midwives in work-related psychological distress. Any studies that met these criteria also had to report at least one outcome measure.

Participants/ population

This review defined the ‘midwife’ in line with the definition given by the International confederation of midwives’ definition that a midwife is a person who has acquired the requisite qualifications to be registered and/or legally licensed to practice midwifery and use the title ‘midwife’ (ICM International Confederation of Midwives, 2011). Student midwives were included due to the fact that they perform midwifery work, experience similar work-related episodes and are the successors of the profession (Davies and Coldridge, 2015; Coldridge and Davies, 2017). Although it was recognised that student midwives effectively practise within a different role and may encounter different manifestations of work-related psychological distress, they were also considered by the research team to form a part of the midwifery workforce.

Intervention(s), exposure(s)

To be included, studies had to evaluate an intervention designed to support midwives and/or student midwives experiencing work-related psychological distress.

Psychological distress refers to a unique, discomforting, emotional state experienced by an individual in response to a specific stressor or demand that results in harm, either temporary or permanent, to the person (Ridner, 2004). Therefore, in line with this description, we defined work-related psychological distress as a unique, discomforting, emotional state experienced by an individual in response to a specific work-related stressor or demand that results in harm, either temporary or permanent, to the person.

Comparator(s)/ control

So that a larger number of potential studies could be included, studies were not required to include either a comparator or control group.

Outcome(s)

Primary outcomes

The identification of interventions designed to support midwives and/or student midwives in work-related psychological distress.

Secondary outcomes

Any quantitative and/or qualitative outcomes and/or experiences relating to intervention use were considered to be secondary outcomes.
Information sources

Searching was conducted between March 31 and May 24, 2016, using 6 electronic databases; namely PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, MEDLINE, Academic Search Complete, Scopus and CINAHL. The use of these multiple databases is recommended for conducting a more comprehensive search (Abdulla et al., 2016). In addition, the reference lists of identified studies were manually searched in an attempt to identify additional publications. The authors of papers identified for inclusion were also contacted to enquire about any further papers relevant for inclusion. Paper retrievals concluded on June 6, 2016.

Search

This search strategy was formulated subsequent to a broad scoping review of the literature in relation to intervention research, the midwifery workforce and work-related psychological distress. During this scoping review, the abstracts and key words of significant papers were scanned and identified. Recurring phrases and key words were then taken and applied to this search. This search strategy was designed in line with contemporary best practices to be broad in nature, and capture as many studies relating to the research questions as possible (Machi and Mcevoy, 2016).

Initially, terms relating to the identification of the midwifery profession were employed. Secondly, terms available which broadly related to any of the outcomes that were considered to be generally associated with ‘work-related psychological distress’ were used. Lastly, terms relating to work, employment, occupation and professional health were used in conjunction with terms associated with the management of general well-being, interventions, treatments, therapies and coping behaviours.

This search strategy was modified to suit the various syntax, subject headings, MeSH headings and thesauruses utilised by the 6 databases used to conduct the search. Table 1 details our CINAHL with Full Text search, the complete search strategy used for all databases is included in our registered protocol.

Study selection

All retrieved articles were exported into a RefWorks database and duplicate articles were removed. Firstly, the primary review author performed an initial assessment of the retrieved articles to identify potentially eligible studies. Titles and abstracts were screened for relevance. The secondary reviewer then cross checked and assessed 10% of the screened articles for accuracy of selection. Any discrepancies in opinion were resolved through discussion. The full texts of eligible articles were assessed against the inclusion criteria. Articles which did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded.

Data Collection process

Data was extracted from selected studies using the MASTARI data extraction instrument from JBI-NOTARI (Pearson, 2004). This tool is presented within Appendix two. Any discrepancies at this stage were again resolved through discussion. Any anecdotal findings were omitted from the data collected.

Data items

Study population information, study methods and outcomes of significance to both the primary and secondary outcomes of this review were extracted from the data.

Quality Appraisal

Both the primary and secondary reviewer assessed the methodological quality of all eligible articles identified. This was done using the scoring system for appraising qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods primary studies in mixed reviews, as published by Pluye and colleagues (Pluye et al., 2009). Overall quality scores are presented in Table 2.

Risk of bias in individual studies

The assessment of methodological rigor tool devised by Hawker et al. (2002) was applied at study level.

Summary measures

Cohen’s d, and 95% confidence intervals (CI) were calculated using pre- and post-intervention data where possible. CI for the effect size between pre- and post-intervention data were calculated for the quantitative results reported by both Wallbank, and Foureur and colleagues (Wallbank, 2010; Foureur et al., 2013). For the study presented by Warriner and colleagues (Warriner et al., 2016), 95% CI for the proportion that reported positive impact were calculated using the Wilson procedure with corrections for continuity (Wilson, 1927). These are presented in Table 4.

Synthesis of results

Results were presented in line with the segregated systematic mixed-methods review approach (Sandelowski et al., 2006). Here, the qualitative and quantitative results of each study were presented separately.

Risk of bias across studies

Publication, time lag, selective outcome reporting and language biases were considered throughout the process of review.

Findings

Study selection

The search strategy identified 524 articles. Sixty-one duplicate articles were removed to reveal 463 articles for further screening. Subsequently, 429 articles were excluded as they fell outside the scope of this review. This left 34 articles to screen for eligibility, 6 of which were selected for inclusion. Articles were excluded because they either did not test a targeted intervention (n=13), did not focus on psychological distress (n=8) or presented themselves as a literature review (n=7). The study selection process was outlined in Fig. 1. Table 2 presented the papers selected for inclusion.

Study characteristics

Six papers were selected for inclusion, resulting in a total of 144 participants being included in this review (assuming the same 14 participants were included within 2 papers relating to the same study) (McDonald et al., 2012; McDonald et al., 2013). All studies included population samples of either midwives and/or student midwives. However, some also included nurses, doctors, maternity support workers and lecturers in their study samples (Wallbank, 2010; McDonald et al., 2012; McDonald et al., 2013; Warriner et al., 2016).

Interventions delivered

In total, n=100 (69%) participants were delivered mindfulness interventions, n=14 (10%) participants were delivered work-based resilience workshops partnered with a mentoring programme, and n=30 (21%) participants were either randomly allocated to a control group or delivered the intervention of clinical supervision.

Intervention delivery periods varied from 7–8 weeks (Foureur et al., 2013; van et al., 2015; Warriner et al., 2016) to 6 months (McDonald et al., 2012; McDonald et al., 2013). One study did not
specify the period of evaluation (Wallbank, 2010). Of those that did, follow up periods varied between 2 weeks (van et al., 2015) and 6 months (McDonald et al., 2013; Warriner et al., 2016).

Study design
Some of these studies were described as either pilot or feasibility studies, yet only two (Wallbank, 2010; Foureur et al., 2013) were found to conform to the standardised definitions of either a pilot or a feasibility study (Aram et al., 2010; Abbott, 2014). As such, some studies were redefined as cohort studies (van et al., 2015; Warriner et al., 2016), where both a comparison and/or control group are not a necessary feature (Dekkers et al., 2012), as they each analysed either repeated outcome measures and/or observed a cohort of participants distinguished by some variable (Doll, 2004; Hellens et al., 2006; DiPietro, 2010). Two of the papers retrieved (McDonald et al., 2012, 2013) each fittingly reported themselves to be one part of a larger collective case study in which midwifery cohorts were included (Gerring, 2004).

Outcomes
Data within the study by Foureur and colleagues (Foureur et al., 2013) was extracted via log book entries, qualitative interviews and a focus group, the GHQ-12 questionnaire, the SOC – Orientation to Life scale, and the DASS scale. The study by Wallbank used the PANAS scale, the ProQol scale and the IES scale to extract data (Wallbank, 2010). Other studies used a research journal and field notes, ‘evaluations’ and qualitative interviews (McDonald et al., 2012; McDonald et al., 2013), qualitative focus group interviews (van et al., 2015) and evaluation questionnaires (Warriner et al., 2016).

All studies reported evidence for positive outcomes. These positive outcomes related to an improved sense of wellbeing (Warriner et al., 2016), reduced stress (Wallbank, 2010; Warriner et al., 2016), enhanced confidence, self-awareness, assertiveness and self-care (McDonald et al., 2012; McDonald et al., 2013). Improvements were also noted in general health, sense of coherence (Foureur et al., 2013), and compassion satisfaction scores (Wallbank, 2010). Sustained positive impacts on anxiety, resilience, self-compassion mindfulness (Warriner et al., 2016), and concentration were also reported (van et al., 2015). Increased clarity of thought and a reduction in negative cognitions (van et al., 2015), compassion fatigue and burnout were also observed (Wallbank, 2010).

Risk of bias assessments for the individual studies were presented in Table 3 using the assessment of methodological rigor tool devised by Hawker and colleagues (Hawker et al., 2002).

Results of individual studies
Findings from mindfulness based interventions were reported by 3 of the studies included (Foureur et al., 2013; van et al., 2015; Warriner et al., 2016). Another two papers report the effects of work-based resilience workshops partnered with a mentoring programme (McDonald et al., 2012; McDonald et al., 2013), and one study examined the effectiveness of clinical supervision (Wallbank, 2010). All interventions were delivered face-to-face. Interventions were facilitated by experienced psychologists, the Oxford Mindfulness Centre and books (Warriner et al., 2016), a workshop facilitator (Foureur et al., 2013), counsellors (van et al., 2015), a clinical psychologist (Wallbank, 2010) and invited ‘expert presenters’ (McDonald et al., 2012; McDonald et al., 2013).
Table 2
Study overviews and characteristics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paper Retrieved</th>
<th>Sample Number</th>
<th>Period of Study</th>
<th>Sample Type</th>
<th>Study Design</th>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Measurement Tools</th>
<th>Country of Study</th>
<th>Quality Score*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Foureur et al. (2013) | 40            | 8 weeks and 1 day intervention period 4–8-week follow up period | Nurses (50%) and midwives (50%)                                           | Mixed-methods pilot study (No comparison group)     | Mindfulness based stress reduction programme (MBSR)                         | – Log books  
  – GHQ-12  
  – SOC – Orientation to Life scale  
  – The DASS scale  
  – Qualitative interviews  
  – Qualitative focus group  
  – Qualitative semi-structured focus group interviews | Australia        | 67%            |
| van et al. (2015)   | 14            | 7-week intervention period 2-week follow up period       | First year nursing and midwifery students                                  | Cohort study                                        | 7-week stress management and mindfulness course                              | – Positive and negative affect schedule (PANAS) scale  
  – Professional Quality of Life scale (ProQol)  
  – Impact of Event Scale (IES) | Australia        | 50%            |
| Wallbank (2010)     | 30            | 6 'sessions of supervision'                              | Midwives and Doctors working in obstetrics and gynaecology                | Pilot study (2 randomised samples)                  | 6 sessions of clinical supervision given by a clinical psychologist         |                                                                                  | United Kingdom | 67%            |
| Warriner et al. (2016) | 46         | 8 weeks and 6 days intervention period 4–6-month follow up period | Hospital (30%), community (30%) and research midwives (9%), maternity support workers (18%), student midwives (9%), doctors (2%) and lecturers (2%) | Cohort study                                        | Mindfulness Course                                                          | – Immediate post follow-up quantitative questionnaire  
  – 4–6-month follow-up quantitative questionnaires  
  – Qualitative interviews  
  – Participant evaluations  
  – -Field notes | United Kingdom   | 33%            |
| McDonald et al. (2013) | 14         | 6-month intervention period 6-month follow up period     | Nurses and midwives                                                       | Qualitative case study                              | Work-based resilience workshops partnered with a mentoring programme         | – Qualitative interviews  
  – Field notes  
  – Research journal | Australia        | 67%            |
| McDonald et al. (2012) | 14         | 6-month intervention period Immediate post-intervention data collection | Nurses and midwives                                                       | Qualitative case study                              | Work-based resilience workshops partnered with a mentoring programme         | – Qualitative interviews  
  – Field notes  
  – Research journal | Australia        | 33%            |

* Quality score: [(number of ‘quality criteria presence’ responses divided by the number of ‘relevant criteria’) × 100].
Quantitative study findings

Foureur and colleagues presented a pilot study in which 20 nurses and 20 midwives from two metropolitan teaching hospitals in New South Wales, Australia took part in a mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) programme (Foureur et al., 2013). This intervention was designed to increase the coherence and improve the health of midwifery and nursing populations and also to decrease depression and anxiety. The workshop facilitator delivered this one day workshop, introduced the research, then went on to discuss the impact of stress on being in the present moment, introduce the concept of mindfulness, describe grounding and diffusion strategies and report how participants might form ‘effective habits’ (Foureur et al., 2013).

Participants also received a copy of a ‘mindfulness practice CD’, and were asked to complete three questionnaires prior to workshop attendance and again 4–8 weeks after participation. Of those who participated in follow up surveys, N=14 (50%) provided log books of their experiences, N=28 (70%) of participants returned the post-intervention surveys, and N=10 (35.7%) of those participants contributed their experiences within either a focus group or individual interview (Foureur et al., 2013). Participants reported that they practised their newly learnt techniques over 44.4% of the available daily practice periods. A reduction in stress levels for some participants was also reported (Foureur et al., 2013). Here, statistically significant differences were found on scores for the GHQ12 measure, the SOC-Orientation to life scale and the stress subscale of the DASS, where improvements were seen in the general health of midwives, their sense of coherence and orientation to life.

An evaluation of the ‘Mindfulness: Finding Peace in a Frantic World’ course recruited 38 midwives out of a cohort of 43 healthcare staff to participate in an 8-week course (Warriner et al., 2016). This study reveals a set of practices that can help break the cycle of unhappiness, stress, anxiety and mental exhaustion. The course runs for 60–90 minutes weekly, and participants are invited to commit to 30 minutes of home practice daily for 6 days a week. For this study, 46 participants were recruited, with 43 completing the course. Of these participants, 78% (n=36) were identified as midwives. Course attendance averaged 87% for available sessions.

Immediate post-intervention evaluation questionnaires indicated that 97% of participants found the course helpful, useful and would recommend it to others. Ongoing benefits were observed via a 4–6-month post-intervention questionnaire, where participants reported a sustained positive impact on stress (83%, n=19), anxiety (68%, n=15), resilience (70%, n=16), self-compassion (74%, n=17) and mindfulness (91%, n=21) (Warriner et al., 2016). At the end of the 4–6 month follow up period, 50% (n=6) of the participants who reported that depression was relevant to them, also reported a positive impact on their mood. Overall, this study reports significant and ongoing positive impacts for staff, as respondents reported benefit in home life (87%, n=20) work life (91%, n=21) and the culture of their workplace (59%, n=13) (Warriner et al., 2016).
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<td>Most information given, but some missing</td>
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<td>Description of how themes derived</td>
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<td>Quantitative</td>
<td>Fair</td>
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<td>No mention of issues</td>
<td>Very poor</td>
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<td>Good</td>
<td>Findings explicit, easy to understand</td>
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<td>Poor</td>
<td>Did not suggest ideas for further research</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>Does not suggest ideas for further research</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3
Risk of bias within studies using the assessment of methodological rigor tool.
In the delivery of clinical supervision, Wallbank reports a significant reduction in subjective stress levels, burnout and compassion fatigue for midwives in distress (Wallbank, 2010). The clinical supervision being delivered here was ‘restorative’ in nature, and applied the Solihull approach (Douglas, 2006). Thirty midwives and doctors participated in this study, and were allocated (presumably equally) to either a control (n=15) or treatment (n=15) group. The treatment group received 6, one-hour clinical supervision sessions delivered by a clinical psychologist.

Within the treatment group, there was a significant difference in the amount of subjective stress scores (p < 0.0001), with average scores decreasing from 29 to 7. There was also a significant difference found in compassion satisfaction scores, as average scores increased from 37 to 41 (p=0.001). Additionally, average burnout scores decreased from 27 to 14 (p < 0.0001) and compassion fatigue/secondary trauma average scores decreased from 16 to 12 (p=0.004). For the control group, follow up results showed no statistically significant differences between post-study scores and earlier scores, apart from those relating to compassion fatigue, where scores slightly increased, yet were still not significant (p=0.846).

Interpretation of confidence intervals and effect sizes

Of the 6 papers retrieved, 3 provided enough statistical data to calculate CI and/or effect sizes for the outcomes measured (Wallbank, 2010; Foureur et al., 2013; Warriner et al., 2016). As shown in Table 4, only two studies were suitable to calculate effect sizes via Cohen’s d (Wallbank, 2010; Foureur et al., 2013). Raw data were not available for these calculations.

In line with more recent classifications (Sawilowsky, 2009), the study by Wallbank has demonstrated a ‘large’ effect size in measurements of compassion satisfaction and a ‘medium’ effect size in measurements of compassion fatigue for the intervention group (Wallbank, 2010). ‘Large’ size effects were also noted for this group in measurements of burnout and the composite scores associated with the total stress impact of events. However, for the control group, all size effects were calculated to be either ‘small’ or ‘very small’.

In the study by Foureur and colleagues (Foureur et al., 2013), ‘medium’ size effects were calculated in scores relating to participants’ orientation to life, stress, comprehensibility and general health based on dichotomous scoring. ‘Large’ size effects were calculated for scores relating to general health based on the sum of likert ratings, and scores relating to manageability, meaning, depression and anxiety were calculated to be ‘small’. A positive or negative Cohen’s d represents the direction of the effect. For example, a negative effect size indicates an increase between the mean values, and a positive effect size indicates a decrease between the mean values.

In line with more recent classifications, none of the CI presented in Table 4 can be defined as narrow (Schimemann et al., 2008). The wider intervals calculated demonstrate uncertainty in the estimated range within which one can be reasonably sure that the true effect or result actually lies.

Qualitative Study Findings

In Foureur and colleagues’ qualitative analysis, 8 participants described feelings of being relaxed, calmer and more focused. Participants also described a new-found realisation of the importance of self-care, an increased capacity to be more aware of people, a tendency to seek help more freely, and be able to control thoughts and stress more effectively (Foureur et al., 2013). However, for a small minority of participants, there was a view that their participation had done little to ameliorate workplace stress. Overall, this study reports that the majority of participants experienced short term insights into the impact of stress on cognition, emotions and behaviour, and developed strategies for being in the present moment (Foureur et al., 2013).

Van der Riet and colleagues piloted another 7-week stress management and mindfulness intervention (van et al., 2015). Here, 14 nursing and midwifery students were invited to participate in seven, weekly 1-hour sessions. Each session involved a didactic component and an experiential component. During these sessions, the practice of sitting mindfulness was taught. Participants were trained to scan their bodies and focus upon various physical sensations. Students were then encouraged to practise exercises regularly in-between sessions (van et al., 2015).

Two weeks after the concluding session, 10 participants joined in a 60-minute semi-structured, focus group interview. Many reported that they could not wholly engage with this intervention, and only 1 student attended all seven sessions. However, others reported becoming more attentive towards themselves and others and better able to care for themselves and others in conjunction with an increased self-awareness (van et al., 2015). Overall, this study reported that participants experienced increased concentration and clarity of thought, in conjunction with increased awareness and a reduction in negative cognitions (van et al., 2015).

McDonald and colleagues explored the efficacy of an intervention consisting of 6 work-based resilience workshops partnered with a mentoring programme delivered over a 6-month period (McDonald et al., 2013). At three phases of study: pre-intervention; immediately post-intervention; and at 6 months’ post-intervention, 14 nurses and midwives were invited to participate in face-to-face, semi-structured interviews.

This intervention encouraged participants to use art, music, journaling and creative movement as learning tools. Creative expression was used to explore constructs and emotional responses that were difficult to express by words alone. During workshops, hand massage, relaxation techniques and aromatherapy were introduced to promote work-related stress relieving strategies. Explicitly, this workshop series explored the topics of mentoring, establishing positive nurturing relationships and networks, building hardness, maintaining a positive outlook, intellectual flexibility and emotional intelligence, achieving work/life balance, enabling spirituality, reflective and critical thinking, and moving forward and planning for the future with participants.

Participants included a combination of enrolled nurses, registered nurses and registered midwives, some holding dual qualifications. Following participation, both personal and professional gains were described as experiential learning opportunities, creative self-expression, exposure to new ideas and strategies, increased assertiveness at work, improved workplace relationships and communication, increased collaborative capital, and an increased understanding of self-care practices (McDonald et al., 2013). In another paper, referring to the same intervention, the 14 nurses and midwives reported an improved sense of wellbeing and a reduction in stress when interviewed following its delivery (McDonald et al., 2012). Participants also reported being able to communicate better with staff whom they feel may be hostile or manipulative towards them.

Those who engaged reported that they were able to develop self-care strategies and adopt a more self-caring attitude (McDonald et al., 2013). Through creative activities, participants also reported that they were better able to develop an internal dialogue, drawing attention to their individual strengths and the hostile aspects of working healthcare (McDonald et al., 2013). Participants also reported a willingness and improved ability to monitor and maintain resilience strategies for both themselves and their colleagues (McDonald et al., 2012). Professionally, colleagues noted a closer group dynamic, more supportive communication, assertiveness and confidence at work. Overall, these two papers reporting on the same intervention, stated that work-based, educational interventions that focus on personal resilience have significant potential to empower, improve wellbeing and reduce stress.

Line of argument synthesis

For these samples, participating in these interventions can have a positive effect on a variety of outcomes in relation to work-related psychological distress. However, the experiences of a small minority
are less favourable, and others are unable to engage wholly in these interventions as provided. Clinical supervision may produce short-term positive benefits, yet those who practice newly learnt mindfulness techniques regularly, and participate in resilience workshops partnered with a mentoring programme may experience positive effects over a longer period of time.

Midwives and student midwives who engage with interventions designed to support them can experience increased cognitive function, improved working relationships with colleagues and a greater appreciation of self-care practices. Feelings of being relaxed and facing the present moment with a sense of clarity can also be experienced. Additionally, as midwives and student midwives develop strategies to manage their own psychological and workplace experiences, they can also develop assertiveness, improved communication skills and workplace resilience. The consensus of these studies was that interventions designed to support midwives and/or student midwives in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval for effect size</th>
<th>Cohen's d</th>
<th>Summary of findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wallbank (2010)</td>
<td>Total stress impact of events (IES) and (PANAS)</td>
<td>(-3.64 to -1.67)</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>A reduction in staff stress, burnout and compassion fatigue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Compass fatigue (ProQol)</td>
<td>(-1.50 to -0.01)</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>Increase in compassion satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Compass satisfaction (ProQol)</td>
<td>(0.15 to 1.65)</td>
<td>-0.90</td>
<td>No statistically significant difference in the scores of the control group compared with their earlier scores.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Burnout (ProQol)</td>
<td>(-2.95 to -1.17)</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Group</td>
<td>Total stress impact of events (IES) and (PANAS)</td>
<td>(-0.63 to 0.80)</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Compass fatigue (ProQol)</td>
<td>(-0.60 to 0.82)</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Compass satisfaction (ProQol)</td>
<td>(-0.84 to 0.58)</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Burnout (ProQol)</td>
<td>(-0.33 to 1.11)</td>
<td>-0.39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foureur et al. (2013)</td>
<td>Orientation to life (SOC)</td>
<td>(0.23 to 1.23)</td>
<td>-0.75</td>
<td>Improved general health and sense of coherence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comprehensibility (SOC)</td>
<td>(0.12 to 1.11)</td>
<td>-0.62</td>
<td>Lower stress levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manageability (SOC)</td>
<td>(-0.11 to 0.84)</td>
<td>-0.37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meaning (SOC)</td>
<td>(-0.29 to 0.66)</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Depression (DASS)</td>
<td>(-0.82 to 0.14)</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anxiety (DASS)</td>
<td>(-0.72 to 0.24)</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stress (DASS)</td>
<td>(-1.16 to -0.18)</td>
<td>0.67</td>
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<tr>
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<td>General health (based on sum of Likert ratings) (GHQ12)</td>
<td>(0.38 to 1.38)</td>
<td>-0.88</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General health (based on dichotomous scoring) (GHQ12)</td>
<td>(-1.10 to -0.11)</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>van et al. (2015)</td>
<td>Attending to self</td>
<td>– No statistical data available</td>
<td></td>
<td>Stress reduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attending to others</td>
<td>– No statistical data available</td>
<td></td>
<td>An enhanced ability to attend to self and others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McDonald et al. (2013)</td>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>– No statistical data available</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reduced experience of stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-awareness</td>
<td>– No statistical data available</td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased assertiveness at work, collaborative capital and understanding self-care practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-care</td>
<td>– No statistical data available</td>
<td></td>
<td>Improved relationships, communication and wellbeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assertiveness</td>
<td>– No statistical data available</td>
<td></td>
<td>A closer group dynamic, more supportive communication, assertiveness and confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McDonald et al. (2012)</td>
<td>Workplace culture</td>
<td>– No statistical data available</td>
<td></td>
<td>Growth in knowledge of personal resilience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased conflict resolution skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
work-related psychological distress can provide a range of both
personal and professional benefits for users. However, given the lack
of data for comparison, small sample sizes and a lack of high quality
studies, this line of argument synthesis is tentative.

Risk of bias across studies

As the studies within this review reported either significant or
favourable results, they may have been at risk of publication bias. Time
lag and selective outcome reporting biases may also have been present
within the studies selected, however, due to lack of relevant informa-
tion, these could not be explored.

Discussion

This review found that clinical supervision, the formal provision by
senior/qualified health practitioners of intensive, relationship-based
education and training, that is case-focused and which supports,
directs and guides the work of colleagues (supervisees) (Milne,
2007), can result in a marked reduction in subjective stress levels
(Wallbank, 2010). Here, medium, large and huge effect sizes were
noted for the treatment group, whereas either small or very small effect
sizes were calculated for the control group.

Work-based resilience workshops partnered with a mentoring
programme evaluations were found to enhance confidence levels,
increased self-awareness, improved assertiveness and an increased
focus upon self-care in midwifery populations (McDonald et al., 2012;
McDonald et al., 2013). The delivery of this intervention was also found
to produce a sustained positive effect upon stress, anxiety, resilience
and self-compassion (McDonald et al., 2013).

Participation in a mindfulness intervention was associated with short
term insights into the impact of stress on cognition, emotions and
behaviour; an increased sense of wellbeing, increased self-awareness and
a reduction in negative cognitions for midwives in distress (van et al.,
2015). Mindfulness can be highly acceptable to midwives, who reported
ongoing and significant benefits in both their home and work life, and
upon the culture of their workplace (Warriner et al., 2016). Mindfulness practice
was also seen to result in better general health; a more positive orientation
to life; improved comprehensibility; and lower stress levels (Foureur et al.,
2013). For these outcomes, ‘medium’ and ‘Large’ size effects were
calculated, yet effect sizes relating to manageability, meaning, depression
and anxiety were calculated to be ‘small’.

However, these studies were too few in number to form a recom-
mandation that providers of health care services should implement
these interventions to support midwives and/or student mid-
wives in work-related psychological distress. Here, some participants
also found it challenging to attend sessions and complete any ‘home-
work’ given (Foureur et al., 2013; van et al., 2015; Warriner et al.,
2016). As such, any future research would only be feasible if midwives
are offered more flexible interventions to use.

None of the studies within this review solely related to either
qualified midwives or student midwives. Given that there are interven-
tions designed exclusively to support the wellbeing of other groups of
healthcare professionals at work, future intervention research could
usefully account for the fact that the midwifery profession is a separate
profession, which may also require targeted support.

Additionally, none of the interventions identified focussed upon
either the organisational or the societal aspects of supporting staff in
work-related psychological distress. This paucity of attention may lead
to the conceptualisation that the management of work-related psycho-
logical distress is primarily an individualised responsibility, rather than
a corporate or societal responsibility. This may enhance levels of work-
related stress, rather than ameliorate them. Future intervention studies
may be improved by recruiting larger samples to focus upon longer-
term outcomes for midwifery populations. It will also be important for
any new or ongoing pilot studies to progress towards undertaking

Limitations

This review was limited to international findings captured within
first world countries, although studies conducted in low-and middle-
icome countries were not excluded from selection. Other studies may
have been evaded, as this search strategy was conducted using only the
English language. Owing to a paucity of information, it has not been
possible to conduct additional analysis such as sensitivity, subgroup
analyses, meta-analysis or meta-regression.

Two of the papers retrieved provided case studies in relation to one
single intervention. This may have altered the weight of evidence in this
regard. This has also meant that the same 14 participants have been
studied within 2 of the papers retrieved.

There is no clear understanding of how these particular interven-
tions lead to the outcomes they produce, some baseline data is absent
and it is unclear whether treatment fidelity measures have been used to
assess delivery. Interventions are also not described in such a way that
these studies could be accurately replicated (Craig et al., 2008).
Moreover, workplace distress, and any change in the experience of or
response to workplace distress, was not directly measured.

Sample sizes were small. Additionally, the heterogeneity of these
samples made some findings difficult to extrapolate solely to midwifery
populations. The retrieved studies are not of high quality, and only one
study included a control group. Therefore, some of the outcomes
apparent may be due to other factors such as social desirability effects
or the therapeutic alliance with those administering the intervention
rather than the type of intervention or mode of delivery per se.

Conclusion

This was the first mixed-methods systematic review to report the
outcomes and experiences associated with the use of interventions
designed to support midwives and/or student midwives in work-
related psychological distress. All selected studies reported a variety
of both personal and professional benefits for midwives.

Similar reviews of interventions designed to support the psycho-
logical wellbeing of healthcare professionals in the workplace report
encouraging results (Regehr et al., 2014; Ruotsalainen et al., 2015;
Guillaume et al., 2016; Murray et al., 2016; Rompannen and Hägman-Lahtila,
2016). Yet likewise, these other reviews do not identify high quality studies in relation to interventions designed to
support midwives and/or student midwives in work-related psycholo-
gical distress. Targeting midwifery populations for future intervention
research may permit more concrete conclusions about the most
effective design and delivery of such interventions.

One other review in relation to preventing stress in the healthcare
workforce has included midwifery populations, and found that a variety
of mindfulness interventions were beneficial to a variety of healthcare
professionals (Burton et al., 2016). In line with the current review, this
review also suggests that future intervention studies may wish to
explore the provision of more flexible and accessible interventions.
Yet in relation to midwifery populations, this review was restricted to the
findings presented by Foureur and colleagues (Foureur et al., 2013).

Additional research is needed to build on this early foundation of
evidence, and clarify which interventions or combinations of interven-
tions might be most effective in addressing the pervasive problem of
work-related psychological distress in midwifery populations. More
flexible interventions, which provide a larger number of midwifery
populations with wider access to support, perhaps online or away from
scheduled sessions may secure greater adherence rates and isolate
effects to determine which elements are affecting which outcome
measures. To secure excellence in maternity care, more rigorous,
well-designed and generalisable studies in this area of intervention
research are required.
S. Pezaro et al.
Midwifery 50 (2017) 163–173

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Appendix A. Supporting information

Supplementary data associated with this article can be found in the online version at doi:10.1016/j.midw.2017.04.003.

References


