Greater Manchester recruitment under way for mental health trial

Recruitment is under way for a new study aiming to strengthen the relationship between mothers suffering severe mental health problems and their baby.

Maternal mental illness is proven to have profound effects on the woman, her family and child.

Between 10 and 20 per cent of women are estimated to develop mental health problems during pregnancy or within the first year of having a baby, with one per cent suffering severe mental illness or significant mental health difficulties requiring specialist psychiatric services.

This feasibility study will look at whether a recently-developed parenting programme called “Baby Triple P” can help.

Researchers are aiming to recruit 60 mothers who have been admitted jointly with their baby to a Mother and Baby Unit (MBU) in either Manchester or Birmingham.

MBUs do not typically offer formally evaluated, evidence-based parenting interventions.

But as part of the study, 30 randomly selected mothers will be offered eight sessions of Baby Triple P in addition to their usual MBU care. The other half will receive their usual care only.

Sonia Bradley, Clinical Research Nurse with NIHR Clinical Research Network, Greater Manchester, said: “It’s estimated that one-in-100 mothers develop severe mental illness after giving birth and will therefore naturally find parenting an even greater challenge than someone in good mental health.

“Improvements have been made but, as yet, there are no structured parenting interventions available to health professionals helping these mothers with their early parenting.

“This study will help us understand whether Baby Triple P can fill that gap by providing a structured therapy which can be offered to mothers in addition to the range of support available at a Mother and Baby Unit.”

Baby Triple P has been derived from the Triple P Positive Parenting Programme, which has proven to be effective for families with older children and has now been expanded to families with babies.

Baby Triple P targets the three areas crucial in enhancing maternal and infant wellbeing:

1. Positive parenting skills promoting secure attachment, reducing maternal and infant distress
2. Improving partner and social support to increase maternal and overall family wellbeing

3. Increasing maternal coping resources to combat mental illness.

The study, funded by the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR), is being led by Chief Investigator Dr Anja Wittkowski from the University of Manchester.

In preparation, Dr Wittkowski has led on a number of small studies, including a pilot which examined the feasibility and acceptability of Baby Triple P in mothers with postnatal depression.