THE WEST MIDLANDS SUDDEN UNEXPECTED DEATH IN INFANCY PROJECT

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INTRODUCTION

The West Midlands SUDI project aims to evaluate the new national approach to investigating sudden infant deaths, where police, health and social services work jointly following a set protocol. It will study how effective the new approach is at determining causes of death and contributory factors as well as offering support to parents and improving their well-being. It will also study in detail the parents’ experiences to determine which aspects of the new approach are most beneficial. The new approach, although now enshrined in law in England, has yet to be evaluated.

BACKGROUND (contd.)

Parents suffer more anxiety and depression following Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) than parents of stillborn infants, or those dying on neonatal units 1. The poorer outcome for SIDS parents may relate to the lack of explanation for the death, and in the absence of one parent's blaming themselves 2. It can be a significant cause of maternal mortality 3.

There is some evidence that a thorough investigation increases the likelihood of a SUDI case having a complete cause of death determined 4 compared to previous approaches 5. A number of potentially modifiable risk factors for SIDS have been established, these include parental smoking 6, co-sleeping (bed sharing) especially on sofas 7, over-heating 8 and prone sleep position 9.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Is the joint agency approach supportive and appreciated by bereaved parents?

Which elements of the joint agency approach (if any) are of particular benefit in helping to identify the cause and circumstances of death and in supporting bereaved parents?

What are the experiences of bereaved parents whose baby’s death has been investigated according to the new joint agency approach?

How does the joint agency approach affect parental recovery and changes in childcare practice?

AIMS

The overall aim of the West Midlands SUDI project is to improve the well-being of parents whose infants have died suddenly and unexpectedly.

The research aim of the West Midlands SUDI project is to explore the impact of the joint agency investigation, undertaken following a sudden unexpected death in infancy and the outcome of the investigation, family’s experience, recovery and possible changes in childcare practice.

PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

The project will use both quantitative and qualitative methods.

It will involve structured interviews, case-note analysis and in-depth interviews.

PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

Families of infants, dying suddenly and unexpectedly will be approached for recruitment following the final case discussion, approximately 4 months after the death. The initial approach to families will be made, in person, by the Paediatrician who has been following up the family since the death.

All families will be asked to complete a structured interview about the investigation following the death, parental knowledge of cause of death and parental health. Families will be re-interviewed at least 2 years after the death, for details of parental mental health, recovery and possible changes in child care practice.

Hospital records, Coroner’s transcripts, police and social service records will be analysed.

A sample of families will be selected for in-depth interviews, several months after the death, for more detail about their experiences.

The study will take place in the West Midlands from 2010-2012. Cases will be identified through Birmingham Women’s Hospital, as all infant post-mortems for the region take place there.

At present there are around 80 SUDI cases a year in the West Midlands, it is hoped to recruit 50% of these giving an estimated sample size of 120 during the study period.

ANTICIPATED BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

The study should result in considerable knowledge about the parental experience of the new joint agency investigation of SUDI; and this knowledge could be used to tailor the approach for maximum benefit to parents.

The study offers the potential for long-term follow-up of SUDI cases, possibly even developing a SUDI cohort of parents, giving a very rich data set. This could be used in the future for other SUDI research projects.

REFERENCES


CONTACT

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