

Presentation is key in antenatal information, research suggests

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The font type of written text and how easy it is to read can be influential when it comes to engaging people with important health information and recruiting them for potentially beneficial programmes, new research by The University of Manchester and Leeds Beckett University has found.

Led by Dr Andrew Manley, a Chartered Sport and Exercise Psychologist and Senior Lecturer in Sport and Exercise Psychology at Leeds Beckett, the study - published in the latest issue of Patient Education and Counselling journal - assessed the extent to which the title and font of participant information sheets can influence a person's perception of written information.

Thirty-five pregnant women and 36 trainee midwives took part in the research and were randomly presented with one of four participant information sheets describing an antenatal programme.

Dr Manley collaborated on the project with his wife and fellow academic, Dr Debbie Smith (School of Psychological Sciences) and Professor Dame Tina Lavender (School of Nursing, Midwifery & Social Work), both of whom are based at The University of Manchester.

"When it comes to people engaging with written information related to their health and wellbeing, it is vital that it is presented in the most accessible format," said Dr Manley. "In reality, such information is presented in all manner of styles, fonts and formats, and we wanted use this study to explore just how much this impacts on people's level of

understanding and engagement."

The information sheets, all detailing the same programme, were presented in four different ways to the trainee midwives and pregnant women participating. The title and font had been manipulated to one of the following:

- Easy to pronounce title and easy-to-read font;
- Difficult to pronounce title and difficult-to-read font;
- Easy to pronounce title and difficult-to-read font;
- Difficult to pronounce title and easy-to-read font.

Dr Manley commented: "It's often assumed that easy to read material is judged as familiar, is more likely to be accepted, and less likely to be scrutinised.

"Within our study, after reading the antenatal programme information sheet, participants were asked to rate their perceptions of the programme in terms of: whether they would be likely to participate in the programme; how easy it was to understand details of the programme; the level of perceived risk associated with participation; and the level of effort required to fulfil participation requirements.

"There were no major differences between how the trainee-midwives perceived the various information sheets, although results for pregnant women's ratings revealed a significant difference in relation to perceptions of the programme's complexity.

"Specifically, when the title was easy to pronounce and the information sheet was presented in an easy-to-read font, pregnant women perceived the programme to be less complex and easier to understand compared to when the title and font were presented in a more awkward style.

"Considering the differences in perceived complexity between the group of midwives and the group of pregnant women, a tentative explanation is that the trainee midwives' broader knowledge of specific issues may have made them less reliant on the presentation of the text.

"Just as previous research has shown that perceived complexity can influence injured athletes' adherence to rehabilitation programmes, our study suggests that similar perceptions may guide [pregnant women's](#) decisions in relation to potentially beneficial programmes. Therefore, practitioners should present participant information sheets in a clear manner if they are to maximise recruitment to a given course or programme. We are currently developing a follow-up study on a larger scale to test the consistency of these findings in other clinical contexts."

More information: "Processing fluency effects: Can the content and presentation of participant information sheets influence recruitment and participation for an antenatal intervention?" [DOI: 10.1016/j.pec.2014.11.005](#)

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