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Introducing the Reproductive Life Plan in midwifery counselling – a randomised controlled trial

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Objective: Many women have insufficient knowledge of reproduction, including health promoting lifestyle prior to conception, and postpone childbearing until ages when their fertile capacity has started to decrease. The aim of our study was to investigate if the usage of the Reproductive Life Plan in midwifery counselling increases women's knowledge of reproduction and particularly knowledge of folic acid intake prior to pregnancy.

Design and methods: The study had a randomised controlled design with one intervention group (IG) and two control groups (CG1, CG2). All groups received standard care and in addition, the IG received the intervention based on the Reproductive Life Plan (RLP). The intervention consisted of a semi-structured discussion with the midwife and a brochure with information about reproduction and the RLP. A total of 299 Swedish-speaking women (mean age 23) were recruited at a Student Health Centre when they came for contraceptive counselling, Chlamydia testing or Pap smear. Participation rate was 89%. The IG and the CG1 filled out a baseline questionnaire in the waiting room before the visit. All groups were followed up with a structured telephone interview two months after inclusion; 262 women participated.

Results: After the intervention, the IG scored higher on the knowledge questions than before the intervention; a mean knowledge score changed from 6.4 to 9.0 out of a maximum of 20 ($p < 0.001$). A higher proportion of the women in the IG were able to mention folic acid intake among things to do when planning to get pregnant after the intervention than before ($p < 0.001$). There was no difference over time in CG1, and no difference between CG1 and CG2.

Conclusions: The RLP-intervention increased women's knowledge of reproduction including knowledge of folic acid intake prior to pregnancy. A midwife initiated use of a RLP seems to be a feasible tool for promoting reproductive health and can be used by all health care professionals working with aspects related to reproduction. Further studies will be needed on how to target men and also to investigate the effect on health behaviour.