

Voicing the silence

Innovation Case Study

Arts & Health

What was the question?

Can we use artistic approaches to improve the maternity care experiences of women who were abused in childhood?

Who were the collaborators?

Jonathan, James and Matt from J Motion; and Dr Elsa Montgomery, Department of Midwifery.



What did we do?

We created a short animated film, *Voicing the silence – Elizabeth's story*. It was based on Dr Elsa Montgomery's qualitative research exploring the maternity care experiences of women who were sexually abused in childhood.

Childhood sexual abuse affects approximately 20% of women but is hidden in society and shrouded in silence. Few women disclose childhood sexual abuse to healthcare professionals, but the potential for trauma in encounters with them is well documented. The study confirmed silence and demonstrated that many aspects of maternity care were reminiscent of abuse. However, childbirth could be healing for women who experienced sensitive care.

There is no direct intervention to support these women: they are often unidentifiable; what they need depends on the individual woman, may change from day to day and is context-specific. Healthcare professionals may feel ill-equipped to deal effectively with disclosures of childhood sexual abuse and educational resources are lacking.

This project was an opportunity to 'voice the silence' through cultural media, to address this deficit and to influence the social impact of childhood sexual abuse. Working with J Motion opened Dr Montgomery's eyes to the potential for using animated film to tell difficult stories and to reach a wide audience, both through the film itself and through the media attention that followed its making.

The film can be found here: youtu.be/afNeLuomAko.

What was the outcome?

The film is being used as an educational resource to help train student and practising midwives to improve the care of survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Dr Montgomery has been interviewed on *Woman's Hour*, which has about 4 million listeners.

