

“Let Me Know If You Need Anything”: Support Realities of New Mothers

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Abstract

This paper presents findings from a study conducted with 48 pregnant and new mothers to understand their support needs and support sources. We engaged 10 first-time pregnant women, 20 pregnant mothers, and 18 new mothers in eight weeks of research activities using closed Facebook groups. The activities included surveys, open ended questions, creative tasks, and discussions. Our findings indicate that mothers most value instrumental support: physical help in tasks, such as laundry and cooking. Our findings also show that support needs and support sources of women evolve as they go through pregnancy, childbirth, and stages of motherhood. Informed by these findings, we propose a design framework - the Evolving Ecology of Support (EES) - and provide examples on how the Pervasive Health community can develop empowering and support enabling solutions.

Significance of the work

We used the Asynchronous Remote Communities (ARC) method to understand the support needs as well as the available support networks of pregnant women and new mothers. The ARC method uses closed Facebook groups as the platform to engage participants in study activities. This platform enables the researchers to include populations which are unable to participate in face-to-face research activities due to geographic, mobility and availability constraints. We engaged our participants - pregnant women and new mothers - in research activities for eight weeks, using 19 different activities posted in the Facebook groups. Activities included open ended discussion prompts, surveys, validated instruments, and creative tasks. This method enabled us to administer multiple activities for triangulation purposes. Analysis of the study participation data shows that ARC method is effective in engaging pregnant women and new mothers in research activities.

Our findings show that mothers' support needs, support sources and technology for support evolve as they transition from pregnancy to motherhood. To address this, we proposed a design framework, Evolving Ecology of Support (EES) and we identified a design space called pregnancy-motherhood continuum, for designers to explore. We challenge the designers of support interventions for mothers to embrace a holistic approach, that take into consideration of the evolving support ecology, and longer life-transitional arc, so that meaningful and effective support interventions can be designed and developed to make a positive impact on new mothers' overall wellness. The opportunity to present our findings and design framework at WISH will help us to receive constructive feedback and ideas for furthering this research.

This paper is presented at the 11th EAI International Conference on Pervasive Computing Technologies for Healthcare in Barcelona, Spain, May 2017, won the best paper award. Our submission to WISH does not conflict with the policies of the EAI where the work was originally presented. To that effect, we got written (email) permission from Dr. Oscar Mayora, co-chair of the Pervasive Health conference to present at WISH.