Early postnatal anal incontinence experience: An existential phenomenological study

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What is postnatal anal incontinence?
How many women experience postnatal anal incontinence after delivery?
What causes postnatal anal incontinence?
What are the consequences of having postnatal anal incontinence?

Research Question:
What is the lived experience of having anal incontinence in the early (less than 12 months) postnatal period following a vaginal delivery?

The methodology
- Phenomenology
- Existential Phenomenology

Steps of the analysis
- Descriptive phenomenological analysis following the steps described by Giorgi (2009)
  - Step 1: Breaking down the transcript into meaning units
  - Step 2: Re-write the meaning units in the third person
  - Step 3: Transform the meaning units
  - Final step: Produce the essential structure

Embodied interpretation following the framework presented by Galvin & Todres (2013)

Results
The essential structure
The experience of early postnatal anal incontinence for three postpartum women involves coming to terms with a body that has changed in an unexpected way, that at times cannot be controlled or predicted, which interferes with the new role of mother and previous roles with others, such as partner and friend. These changes encompass much emotional engagement. Participants are anxious about the uncertainty of their body, how they might manage it and how it may influence their future. Participants’ symptoms can cause them embarrassment, or fear of embarrassment, particularly in public situations, and there can be a reluctance to disclose the problem to others. Participants have an overwhelming instinct to put the needs of the baby first, regardless of the consequence for themselves. The women begin to develop familiarity with their new body and role of motherhood and are (more or less) hopeful with the possibility of recovery.
The Key Constituents

- The changed bodily experience
- Emotional engagement
- Maternal instinct of 'baby comes first'
- Becoming familiar with the postnatal bodily self
- Sense of hope
- The evolving sense of a new self

Embodied interpretation: A poem