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Abstract Title

Perinatal Mental Health Screening for First Nations Mothers: A Qualitative Study of Provider Perspectives

Authors

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Background

Perinatal mental health (PMH) concerns during pregnancy and the first year postpartum can affect maternal, child, and family well-being. For First Nations mothers, PMH screening occurs within broader contexts shaped by colonization, racism, culturally unsafe care, jurisdictional barriers, and fear of child welfare involvement. Although screening is widely recommended as part of routine perinatal care, less is known about how screening is implemented with First Nations mothers across healthcare and community-based settings.

Objective

This study aims to explore provider perspectives on current and perceived best practices in perinatal mental health screening for First Nations mothers, including screening approaches, referral and follow-up care, cultural responsiveness, barriers, adaptations, and recommendations.

Methods

This proposed study will use a qualitative descriptive design guided by the Ethical Space of Engagement framework. Approximately 15-20 Indigenous and non-Indigenous healthcare and community-based providers will be recruited through direct invitations and respondent-driven sampling. Eligible participants will have at least two years of relevant experience and direct involvement in PMH screening, response, referral, or follow-up care with First Nations mothers during pregnancy and/or postpartum. Participants will engage in a semi-structured interview lasting approximately 45 minutes. The interview will gather demographic information and explore provider roles and settings, current screening practices, use of screening tools or informal approaches, referral and follow-up pathways, cultural responsiveness, barriers, adaptations, and recommendations. Data will be analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis.

Results

This proposed research is expected to generate themes related to current screening practices, provider decision-making, cultural responsiveness, referral and follow-up pathways, and perceived gaps in care.

Conclusion

This research will address a gap in understanding how PMH screening is implemented in practice. Findings may inform provider guidance, services delivery, policy, and future community-informed research supporting culturally responsive PMH for First Nations families.