



Positively Moved: What Participants Need From A Perinatal Substance Use Support Program



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Background

Perinatal substance use support programs have historically been directed toward achieving drug abstinence in participants, a goal that research suggests may not be appropriate given the lived reality of program participants (Marcellus, MacKinnon, Benoit, Phillips, & Stengel, 2015). Given that substance use during pregnancy intersects with social and biological health determinants such as chronic illness, violence, and poverty, a more responsive approach to program design is needed (Jessup & Brindis, 2005).

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to make visible what is necessary and important to participants of one perinatal substance use support program. This research project contributes to evidence-based practice, where the lived experience of women participating in a perinatal substance use support program is valued as the evidence around which effective and supportive resources can be built.

Methodology

The present study arises from a secondary analysis of an existing qualitative data set made up of semi-structured interviews, which were recorded and transcribed. The existing data were gathered as part of a larger mixed-method study seeking to explore team communication and participation and client success in the HerWay Home (HWH) program. HWH is an initiative in Victoria, BC, which provides care for women experiencing problematic substance use during pregnancy. The secondary analysis that comprises this research study was completed by two undergraduate nursing students at the University of Victoria. We began by reading and re-reading the data together then coded our data individually, using literal, simultaneous, and analytic coding approaches (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Saldana, 2009). Codes were then compared and sorted into emerging categories, which gave rise to four themes. We present these themes in the words of our participants.

Results

Connecting

“An uplifting atmosphere....that I felt positively moved by.”

“I definitely want to feel like I’ve made a friend or two. Like I’ve had at least one half-decent conversation while I was there.”

Celebrating

“It would just be nice if that was like, a place where that was really celebrated, and, yeah, celebrated rather than being concerned about, rather than, you know, it would be nice to walk in and feel like the people are already looking at you as a positive.”

Advocating

“A centre that’s actually arms opened.... where you’re capable of just going to a place and they are capable of helping you out.”

“Right now I don’t have any choices.”

“Somebody to enforce that I need help, instead of just my own word.”

Nourishing

“Right now, like, being in the situation, I have to be like, breakfast, lunch, supper at a certain place if I want to get those meals.”

“Empowerment is the most important tool you can get.”

Key Messages

- Women participating in the HWH program who were interviewed for this project did not prioritize drug abstinence.
- While substance use is the focus of perinatal substance use support programs, participants have physiologic, safety, and security needs that, for them, take priority over addressing substance use.
- Participants in this study identified a gap between the needs they have and their ability to access resources to meet those needs. Participants are looking for staff of perinatal substance use programs to act as advocates to help participants get their needs met.
- Participants identified that it is important to them that staff are understanding, open to their needs, and responsive to their uniqueness as individuals
- Participants expressed hope that participating in a perinatal substance use program would give them the opportunity to connect with resources and to make new friends.
- It is important to participants that staff in perinatal substance use support programs like HWH celebrate the participants’ pregnancy journeys, regardless of their history of substance use.

References

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