

Exploring Substance Use in Pregnancy

Insights from a Retrospective Study

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Introduction

Substance use during pregnancy poses serious risks, including preterm birth, low birth weight, and childhood developmental issues. This study aims to assess the prevalence and patterns of alcohol and substance use among pregnant women attending antenatal care through a multi-disciplinary, continuity of care clinic.

Methods

This retrospective cohort study examined electronic medical records of pregnant women seen by the Alcohol and Drug Awareness in Pregnancy Team (ADAPT) at a major health centre over an 18-month period. Variables included substance use (tobacco, alcohol, illicit drugs) during the antenatal period, as well as mental health history, mode and timing of delivery, and engagement with the ADAPT clinic. Data collected were organized in an Excel document for analysis.

Results

The study found cannabis to be the most commonly used substance (80%), followed by methamphetamines (19%), and cigarettes (24.4%), with frequent poly-substance use. Mental health issues were prevalent in 92.7% of the population. Vaginal births were predominant (75.9%), with 38.5% experiencing full-term deliveries. A significant majority (93%) engaged in postpartum follow-up, indicating positive uptake of postnatal care. However, an identified area of improvement is contraception discussions to enhance family planning and maternal and child health outcomes in this population.

Discussion

This study highlights the need for targeted interventions and ongoing protocol improvement for pregnant women with substance use. With a significant prevalence of mental health issues, simultaneously prioritising mental health is essential. The multi-disciplinary, continuity of care model of the ADAPT service is valuable in improving engagement and addressing the complex link between substance use and mental health, requiring collaborative efforts for a tailored approach to meet the diverse needs of this vulnerable population.