

# Barriers in Healthcare for Pregnant Women Experiencing Homelessness

Carlie Lyons & Kristin Rucker

East Tennessee State University College of Nursing

## Introduction

- The homeless population is an increasing problem seen every day around the world. There is an estimate of 553,742 people in the United States experiencing homelessness each night. ("The State of Homelessness in America", 2022)
- Being pregnant while experiencing homelessness is defined as using family emergency shelters during and shortly following birth.
- Women experiencing homelessness suffer not only from the stress and events contributing from homelessness, but studies show there are higher rates of unintended pregnancies. They undergo barriers such as having poor birth outcomes compared to women who aren't homeless while pregnant. (Ruffalo, T. et al, 2018).

## Purpose

- The purpose of this research was to identify and analyze the barriers to prenatal care experienced by women who are pregnant and homeless.

## Background

- Homelessness is a complex social problem all over the world that affects society by costing the government money for shelters, is vulnerable to public health, and shapes the next generation of those who are born into homelessness (Ponio, J., 2021).
- The Homeless Prenatal Program is a nonprofit organization that entrusts homeless and low-income families/mothers to strengthen and motivate them to transform their lives for their future child.



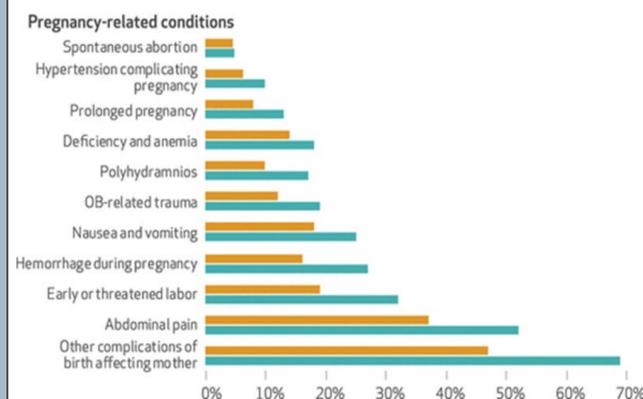
- Prenatal services are available to promote healthy births. ("What We Do – Homeless Prenatal Program", 2022)

## Literature Review Methods

- Databases searched: Google Scholar, PubMed, and CINAHL.
  - A total of ten articles within the past 5 years were used from peer reviewed articles and peer reviewed journals.
- Key words: "Homelessness", "Women", "Pregnancy", "Childbirth", "Nursing", "Prenatal Care", "Access to Care"

## Significant Findings

- In a study of 323,000 women, findings concluded homeless women experience higher birth costs, more premature births, and increased risk of birth defects. (Yamamoto, et al. 2021)
- A study of 9,124 women was conducted to provide evidence that 48% of women staying in a shelter were pregnant, 78% visited the ED, and 61% had no insurance. It also explored pregnancy complications as shown in the graph below. (Clark, R. E. et al., 2019)



- A study that analyzed 21 studies determined there were four theories: health risks for the women and the fetus/child, discourses on prenatal care, rights of women and fetuses/children, and meaning of motherhood.
  - Five out of the 21 studies found that homelessness and/or drug use affected the health of the woman and fetus/child.
  - Two of the 21 articles found that prenatal care should be received.
  - Six of the 21 studies determined women were likely to refuse to seek care in fear of losing their child or becoming incarcerated. (Santos, G, C., 2021)

## Conclusion & Nursing Implications

- Interventions targeting housing and healthcare to homeless women during pregnancy may improve this populations birth outcomes (Cutts et al. 2015)
- Initial care should focus on the basic needs and establishing trusting relationships in order to promote meaningful and personalized sexual care to the homeless population (McGregor et al. 2021)
- In conclusion, research shows that homelessness and unstable housing during pregnancy does contribute to pregnancy complications. There is a need for further research.
  - Nurses can provide adequate teaching about healthcare to help homeless women become more comfortable with seeking care by being advocates. (Clark et al. 2019)



## References

