Mitigating Housing Insecurity Health Risks for Pregnant Persons and Newborns in Chicago’s Coordinated Entry System

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I PROMOTE–IL

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THE INTERSECTION OF
MATERNAL HEALTH AND
HOUSING INSECURITY

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Housing: A Social Determinant of Health

• Poor housing conditions can lead to social, environmental, and health inequality
  • This is especially prevalent among marginalized populations, single parent families, and women, all who are more likely to live in unsuitable housing.

• Historic housing discrimination policies and practices have and continue to influence maternal and child health outcomes.
Pregnancy & Housing Insecurity

• Pregnancy can increase an individual’s risk of becoming homeless, and pregnant persons face significantly greater health risks while unstably housed\(^3\)
  • Pregnant women on public assistance have an 18% probability of being homeless, compared to a 2% probability among non-pregnant women on public assistance\(^4\)

• Young women experiencing homelessness are at higher risk of becoming pregnant
  • Homeless young women are almost five times more likely to become pregnant\(^5\) and far more likely to experience multiple pregnancies\(^6\) than housed young women

• Most pregnant women experiencing homelessness are covered under Medicaid, but their unique health needs and patterns of healthcare use are not well understood
Challenges to Receiving Prenatal Care While Experiencing Housing Insecurity

• Fragmentation of health services and low accessibility/long waitlists
• Inadequate care that does not recognize complex and diverse needs
• Attitude & treatment from healthcare providers (stigma)
• Difficulty navigating and maintaining insurance/Medicaid
• Feelings of shame, embarrassment, isolation, and poor mental health
• Transportation, geographical location
• Competing lifestyle demands
• Fear and distrust of Child Protection Services
Housing Insecurity During Pregnancy and Adverse Outcomes

• Persons in shelters during or shortly after pregnancy had higher rates of substance use disorders, anxiety, depressive disorders, and injuries\textsuperscript{4}

• Persons experiencing homelessness during pregnancy had higher odds of low birthweight and preterm birth\textsuperscript{9}

• Being evicted while pregnant (especially in 2\textsuperscript{nd} or 3\textsuperscript{rd} trimester) is linked to earlier births and lower birthweight\textsuperscript{10}

• Experiencing homelessness 12 months before or during pregnancy was associated with the greatest increase in Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) scores among children by age 3\textsuperscript{11}
Pregnancy-related Conditions in Both Homeless and Comparison Women in Massachusetts

Source: Clark et al. (2019) Health Affairs
The Influence of Housing Discrimination on Maternal Health

• Individuals giving birth in communities impacted by historically racist housing policies and practices are more likely to:
  • Be experiencing epigenetic risk factors due to historical trauma
  • Be exposed to stress related to housing instability and cost
  • Be living in housing with greater indoor environmental risks and hazards (i.e., lead or pests)\(^2\)

• Infants of parents in communities impacted by historically racist housing policies and practices are more likely to be born preterm\(^2\)
Violence & Housing Instability

• Even with stable housing, violence in the home can adversely affect the health and wellbeing of pregnant women\textsuperscript{12}

• Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) includes physical, sexual, and psychological abuse by a current or former romantic partner
  • In one study, results estimated that nationally 3\%-9\% of pregnant women and 7\% of postpartum women experience IPV\textsuperscript{13}

• Lack of other housing or shelter options is a crucial barrier for seeking safety from abusive partners
  • Limited space at emergency shelters result in survivors staying in cars, motels, or returning to perpetrator\textsuperscript{14}
  • Immigrant and minority women experience amplified barriers\textsuperscript{14}
Experiencing Violence While Pregnant or Postpartum

- Experiencing IPV during the prenatal period negatively influences the pregnant person's perception of parenting, confidence, and ability to bond with their child after birth\textsuperscript{15}

- Infants born to women who experience IPV during pregnancy are more likely to suffer from low birth weight and require intensive care treatments\textsuperscript{16}

- IPV tends to resume after pregnancy, thus the postpartum period is an important time to address IPV\textsuperscript{16}
Safe Housing Conditions and Adverse Birth Outcomes

• Exposure to mold or dampness increases likelihood for low birthweight\textsuperscript{17}

• Over-crowded housing was associated with infants being born in the 10\textsuperscript{th} percentile or lower for gestational age\textsuperscript{18}

• Mothers experiencing housing disarray (i.e., dark, crowded, noisy) and housing instability (moved more than twice in past 2 years) were more likely to screen positive for depression or generalized anxiety disorder (GAD)\textsuperscript{18}
Policy Suggestions

• Advocate for shelter-based interventions providing prenatal care

• Advocate for expansion of programs which provide units conducive for families (i.e., not studios or individual-sized units)

• Advocate for policies that support fair and just housing, such as eliminating racist restrictive covenants in housing and property deeds
  • More funding for federal housing programs (National Housing Trust Fund)

• Increase access to consistent preventive care

• Reconfigure services to deliver care that meets homeless people's complex and diverse needs
  • Decrease fragmentation of health services
  • Staff training on working with homeless populations

• Continue supporting or building upon legislation passed during COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., emergency rental assistance, sealing eviction records, and foreclosure moratorium)
Policy Suggestions

• Housing cannot be addressed in isolation. Must also work to ensure community safety and economic stability, including:
  
  o Institutional policies promoting and enforcing screening in health care systems\textsuperscript{21} 
    • Substance use disorders, mental health, safe housing, intimate partner violence
  
  o Funding to provide victim assistance & housing to support pregnant/postpartum women needing to leave violent intimate partners\textsuperscript{21}
  
  o Social policies to support the education and employment of women & provide adequate day care for working parents
  
  o Paid Family Leave
  
  o Build Back Better with $150 Billion for Affordable Housing
References

References


The Effects of Homelessness on Infants

Nancy Heil, MD, FAAP
Co-Chair
ICAAP First Steps: Improving Child Health and Housing

From in the womb to the time of birth
Areas to Be Covered

What happens in the womb

Risks at the time of birth

Preventing infant deaths and other adverse outcomes associated with homelessness
The Womb

Excessive stress = permanent changes

*20+ years of studies by multiple researchers
The Baby Prepares for a World of Danger:

- Epigenetic changes which can pass to later generations
- Changes to specific deep brain structures
- Altered body stress pathways
Fight or Flight Response to Minor Stressors
Well Established Risks at Birth

- Low birth weight
- Prematurity
- Stay in Neonatal Intensive Care Unit
New Stanford Study on Homelessness and Pregnant Persons

- Mental health problems
- Substance abuse
- Asthma
- Pre-existing diabetes
- Pre-existing hypertension

539 homeless, pregnant women in California were compared to 1,000,000 women who were not homeless.
Newborns from the Stanford study

- Low birth weight
- Prematurity
- Respiratory Distress Syndrome
- IVH (bleeding inside the head)
- Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome

Evictions’ Negative Impact

Study of 89,000 births to 45,000 mothers who experienced evictions during the period 2000-2016 in Georgia.

Highest Risk For Low Birth Weight & Prematurity

1st

2nd and 3rd Trimester
“These findings suggest that eviction actions during pregnancy are associated with adverse birth outcomes, which have been shown to have lifelong and multigenerational consequences.”

How Do We Prevent Infant Morbidity and Mortality?
Other Effective Investments

- Public health
- Solid waste disposal
- Parks

Housing Insecurity Hurts Unborn Babies; Rental Assistance Reduces the Impact

Pre-Term or Low Birthweight
Of Housing Insecure Pregnancies

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Infant Mortality
of 99 Housing Insecure Pregnancies

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The Takeaways...
UNSTABLE HOUSING

EVICTIONS

HOMELESSNESS

Significant risk to unborn babies
STABLE HOUSING

Supports healthier babies
Appendix I
References used in the PowerPoint


Appendix II
Epigenetics


Appendix III
Prenatal stress and neurodevelopment


Appendix IV
Homelessness during pregnancy and birth complications
