

Study examines support programs for pregnant, postpartum people at state prisons

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Published in the *Journal of Criminal Justice*, researchers from the University of Minnesota Medical School examined the variation of support programs for pregnant and postpartum people at six state prisons

in the U.S. The study found the success of programs was largely dependent on collaboration between program facilitators and partnering prison sites.

"Put simply, prisons were built by men, for men, and there's been very little attention paid to the needs of women, especially those who are pregnant or postpartum in prison. This study is important because it examines unique support programs for pregnant and postpartum people," said Rebecca Shlafer, Ph.D., MPH, an associate professor at the U of M Medical School. "When we have a better understanding of what these prisons are doing, these can serve as models for other states to improve the care and treatment of this population."

Researchers conducted interviews to collect information on [historical context](#), conception and key aspects of the implementation of services offered at each site. The authors found each program has created or adapted its components to serve their specific populations and expressed needs. Services fell into five broad categories: group-based education and support, one-on-one support, labor and birth support, lactation facilitation and support, and other [support services](#). Group-based education and support was the only program component offered by all six programs. Four of the six programs also offered one-on-one support, labor and birth support, and lactation support and facilitation.

Based on the first set of interviews with program facilitators, researchers outlined these specific recommendations for corrections and prison administrators:

- Assess the needs and fit of program components by directly consulting with pregnant and postpartum people who are incarcerated in a specific facility.
- Identify community-based partners, like nonprofit organizations, universities, or hospital systems, that bring diverse professional

expertise and have an interest in building collaborative partnerships to provide these types of programs to people in prison.

- Identify leaders and champions within the [prison](#) and at the Department of Corrections level who will support this type of programming

Researchers say it's important for sites to share information and resources to help future programs get off the ground. They suggest future research may benefit from assessing the perspectives of other individuals involved with these programs, such as program staff, leadership, and especially program participants, and understanding how these services change over time, particularly as the COVID-19 pandemic recedes.

More information: Stephanie H. Wilson et al, Enhanced perinatal programs for people in prisons: A summary of six states' programs, *Journal of Criminal Justice* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2022.101965](#)

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