

Title

Screening for employment and working conditions in prenatal care: patient perspectives

Abstract

Background: Work is an important social determinant of health. Prenatal employment is typically not harmful; however, certain working conditions and the lack of paid leave are linked to adverse perinatal outcomes.

Objective: The objective of this qualitative study is to explore patient perspectives on screening for employment and working conditions in prenatal care.

Methods: We conducted one-on-one and small group interviews between October 2021 and January 2022. We interviewed 20 people who had been employed while pregnant within the five years preceding data collection and met at least one condition signaling potential elevated risk for work-related challenges. Participants were shown “basic” and “detailed” employment-related questions from a set of existing social risk screening tools, based on SIREN’s screening tools comparison tables and a recent systematic review, and asked to reflect on whether the tools captured their experiences. We used applied thematic analysis to inductively identify themes based on participants’ reactions to screening questions and follow-up prompts about what they want their healthcare providers to understand about their jobs and the conditions in which they want to be asked.

Results: Our findings fall into two primary domains: content of screening tools and context in which screening occurs. Within the content domain, themes were that the basic employment-related screening questions do not capture the important nuance of employment during pregnancy; a detailed employment questionnaire is helpful for identifying and understanding risks at work; but that both sets of tools fail to capture key content (e.g., postnatal plans, work-related psychological strain). Within the context domain, themes were that, while preferences about when and how information is collected vary, whether and how information gathered will be used is critical; and screening should happen early - and repeatedly - in pregnancy.

Conclusion: Patients are open to being screened for employment-related needs during pregnancy, but existing tools are insufficient.