

research snapshot

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Addressing emotional regulation and problem-solving needs in pregnant and parenting women with substance-related problems

What is this research about?

The common issues that women face when seeking treatment include dealing with the struggles of parenthood, past trauma, homelessness, stigma, childcare, transportation, and child welfare services. There is a need to better understand these women's experience and to develop an integrated approach to helping them better navigate the treatment system and recover faster. This work includes accommodating and developing women's emotional regulation and problem-solving skills to support.

What did the researchers do?

Researchers conducted six focus groups with 50 women who received integrated substance use treatment across Ontario. All participants were mothers with children under six years old. Using a strengths-based approach, the women were asked about their experiences with substance use counsellors as well as aspects of their relationship with their counsellor that they found most and least helpful.

What did the researchers find?

Researchers found specific strategies that counsellors can use to support women's

What you need to know:

More than a third of all people who receive treatment for substance use and addictions are women and more than half have children or are pregnant.

Recommended service models for women take a holistic and integrated approach, combining substance use treatment with services for mental health, parenting, primary and pre-natal care, child welfare, and social services. Based on a series of focus groups with women who received integrated substance use treatment across Ontario, researchers identified strategies that counsellors can use to better serve these women. They also present a preliminary model of strategies used in integrated treatment to support the emotional and problem-solving needs of pregnant and parenting women with substance-related problems.

emotional regulation and problem-solving skills. These are:

Supporting emotional regulation skills:

- **Non judgment:** Seeing the woman for who she is as a full person, without judgment.

- **Empathetic listening:** Sitting with her. Really listening what she has to say.
- **Supportive commitment:** Giving support where she needs it. Empowering her no matter what.
- **In the moment support:** Helping her overcome her negative feelings. Preparing her for the challenges of today and tomorrow.
- **Flexibility to client need:** Meeting her where she is at. Troubleshooting issues.

Supporting problem-solving skills:

- **Making it easier to navigate the system:** Simplifying paperwork and referral processes. Doing this work for clients.
- **Action-oriented goals and plans:** Creating plans to deal with life stressors. Building skills for life. Fostering resilience.
- **Cueing, contacting, and reminding:** Reminding clients of upcoming appointments. Using prompts to support and adjust their behaviour.
- **Parent coaching, adapted to the woman's style of learning:** Using strategies best suited to her learning needs. Providing information in a way that helps them implement the new behaviours well.

How can you use this research?

This research may be useful for clinicians, service providers, researchers, and policymakers. As client feedback promotes improved treatment for women living with substance use challenges, the researchers' findings may help those working with this group. This approach may also be of use to those who are using or plan to use integrated care. Similarly, those working with people who

experience limitations in their emotional regulation and executive functioning skills may find this research helpful.

About the researchers

Dr. Karen Milligan has a PhD in Clinical Child Psychology from the University of Toronto. She is an Associate Professor at Ryerson University.

Dr. Amelia Usher received her PhD in Psychology from Ryerson University. She is now a Research Advisor with Ontario's Ministry of Community and Social Services.

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Keywords

Substance use; integrated treatment; executive function; emotional regulation; mothers

This *Research Snapshot* is based on their article, "Supporting pregnant and parenting women with substance-related problems by addressing emotion regulation and executive function needs," published in *Addiction Research & Theory*, 2016. 25(3), 251-261. doi.org/10.1080/16066359.2016.1259617

Evidence Exchange Network (EENet) has partnered with the **Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University** to produce Research Snapshots in the field of mental health and addictions in Ontario. This resource was developed by Evidence Exchange Network. EENet helps create and share evidence to build a better mental health and substance use system in Ontario. We connect mental health and addictions system stakeholders with each other and with relevant, actionable evidence to inform decision-making. Part of the Provincial System Support Program (PSSP) at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), the network includes researchers, clinicians, service providers, system planners, policymakers, persons with lived experience, and families.

This summary was written by Brandon Hey. To learn more about EENet, please visit www.eenet.ca and www.eenetconnect.ca.

