



Research Article

Meeting the needs of women in the perinatal period, who use or are in treatment for using drugs: A mixed-methods systematic review

Emma Smith,^{1*} Shirley Lewis,² Lynne Gilmour,³ Louise Honeybul,³
Helen Cheyne,³ Narendra Aladangady,^{4,5} Brigid Featherstone,²
Margaret Maxwell,³ Joanne Neale,¹ Mariana Gonzalez Utrilla¹
and Polly Radcliffe¹

¹National Addiction Centre, King's College London, London, England

²Department of Behavioural and Social Sciences, School of Human and Health Sciences, University of Huddersfield, Huddersfield, England

³NMAHP Research Unit, University of Stirling, Stirling, Scotland

⁴Neonatal Unit, Homerton University Hospital, Homerton Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, London, England

⁵Child Health, Barts and The London School of Medicine and Dentistry, Queen Mary University of London, London, England

*Corresponding author emma.10.smith@kcl.ac.uk

Published August 2025
DOI: 10.3310/GJPR0321

Plain language summary

Meeting the needs of women in the perinatal period, who use or are in treatment for using drugs: A mixed-methods systematic review

Health and Social Care Delivery Research 2025
DOI: 10.3310/GJPR0321

NIHR Journals Library www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk

Plain language summary

Introduction

Women who use drugs, or who are in treatment for using drugs, during and after pregnancy often have health and social care needs that can poorly impact both mothers and children. This is complicated because women who use drugs during and after pregnancy might not respond to the treatment that is available for them. We wanted to find out which types of psychological and social therapy and support worked best for these women.

What we did

A systematic review takes a detailed look at the published research on a topic to make recommendations after looking at the evidence. We searched for articles that described psychological and social therapies and support for women who use drugs while pregnant. We included research from all countries and from the years 1991 to 2023.

What we found

We found 15,655 articles and, after checking them for relevance, included 197 in the review; 217 separate types of treatment were described within these articles. The treatments were mostly delivered to individuals and were community based. Analysis of the measurable, quantitative data did not show that any one intervention worked better than any other, although the findings did show that practical support, including support for child care, transportation and housing, was important in helping women to engage with treatment. Data from qualitative studies showed that women appreciated being able to access multiple services in one place and that they valued a non-judgemental approach from staff.

Overall

Women found practical support to be very useful, and there is also some evidence to show that 'one-stop shops' (where multiple services are located together) are helpful to women who use or are in treatment for drugs during and after pregnancy.