Studying Young Mothers Use of Opioids Following Childbirth in 200 Words

Family & Community Health

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Philadelphia, like many communities nationwide, has been deeply impacted by the country's opioid epidemic. From what we now know, the roots of this crisis, in part, stem from increased prescribing of opioids to patients with acute or painful injuries. One medical event that we tend to overlook in conversations about opioid prescribing is childbirth. Early evidence suggests that as many as 90 percent of women who have C-sections and 12 percent of women who deliver vaginally receive an opioid prescription. This exposure to opioids places them at risk for transitioning to inappropriate use of opioids following the birth of their child, particularly for populations at higher risk of substance use disorders. However, we don't yet know the reality of the impact of postpartum exposure to opioids and later misuse of these drugs.

I'm particularly interested in understanding this as it relates to young, low-income mothers, who may be vulnerable to substance use disorders due to past involvement with the child welfare system or other experiences of trauma. Thanks to a pilot project award from University of Pennsylvania's Leonard Davis Institute, my team will be taking this year to investigate how many young women receive opioids after childbirth, how many subsequently start inappropriately using opioids and what risk factors—particularly risk factors that may be related to trauma exposure—contribute to this behavior. I invite you to stay tuned as we unpack this critical issue for Philadelphia's low-income, young mothers.

This post is part of our "____ in 200 Words" series. In this series, we tackle issues related to children's health policy and explain and connect you to resources to help understand them further, all in 200 words. If you have any suggestions for a topic in this series, please send a note to PolicyLab's Strategy & Communications Manager Lauren Walens.

Meredith Matone
Meredith Matone
DrPH, MHS
Director