"Instead of Just Taking My Baby, They Could've Actually Given Me a Chance": Experiences with Plans of Safe Care Among Birth Parents Impacted by Perinatal Substance Use

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Background: Federal legislation mandates healthcare providers to notify child protective service (CPS) agencies and offer a voluntary care plan called a "plan of safe care" (POSC) for all infants born affected by prenatal substance use. While POSCs aim to provide supportive services for families impacted by substance use, little is known about birth parents' perceptions and experiences.

Objective: To examine birth parents' perceptions and experiences regarding POSC.

Participants and setting: Parents offered a POSC in Philadelphia in the prior year were included.

Methods: This is a qualitative interview study. Participants were recruited from birth hospitals and community-based programs with telephone consent and interview procedures. Transcripts were analyzed using an inductive, grounded theory approach to identify content themes.

Results: Twelve birth parents were interviewed (30.7 % of eligible, contacted individuals). Fear of CPS involvement and stigma were common. Some birth parents reported that the increased scrutiny related to POSCs negatively impacted their attitudes toward healthcare providers and medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD). While parents found the consolidated resource information helpful, many did not know how to access services. Finally, parents desired more individualized plans tailored to their unique family needs.

Conclusions: Stigma, confusion, and fear of CPS involvement undermine the goal of POSCs to support substance-exposed infants and birth parents. Providers serving this population should be transparent regarding CPS notifications, provide compassionate, non-stigmatizing care, and offer coordination services to support engagement after discharge. Policymakers should consider separating POSCs from CPS to avoid exacerbating fear and mistrust.

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