Informed Consent Form for Perinatal Mental Health Research

This informed consent form is for pregnant and postpartum women, aged 18 and older, in English-speaking communities in the United States and abroad, who are willing to participate in qualitative/quantitative psychological research regarding the perinatal mental health services available to women.

Name of Primary Investigator: Mary Stelter, PsyD
Name of Organization: The Stelter Institute, Inc.
Name of Project and Version: Perinatal Mental Health Survey, Phases 1-4

Part I: Information

Introduction
I am Mary Stelter, a doctoral psychology independent researcher investigating community services for pregnant and postpartum women, and I invite you to share your experience of what it is like to be pregnant or recently postpartum (within 1 year). I am going to give you information and invite you to be part of this research. You do not have to decide today whether or not you will participate in the research. Before you decide, you can talk to anyone you feel comfortable with about the research. If you have questions later, you can ask them of me or of another researcher.

Purpose of the research
Research indicates that community services for pregnant and postpartum women may have a trauma-prevention effect during the pregnancy and postpartum period, if offered in sensitive and accessible methods. However, it is unclear how available and effective these trauma-prevention efforts are, and whether there are inequities in the distribution of services, and how other life stressors impact the use of these services. This study seeks to understand your experience of life as a pregnant or postpartum woman.

Type of Research Intervention
This study includes a demographics survey, and possible interview. Interviews are scheduled for a time agreeable to you and I, and are conducted on Zoom, or another video conferencing platform. Interviews are recorded and transcribed. If translation is needed, please contact me prior to the interview. The interview will take about one to one-and-a-half hour.

Participant Selection
You are being invited to participate in this research because your experience as woman experiencing pregnancy or postpartum recovery may contribute to the information that policy-makers need when they make decisions about birth and postpartum support programs. Your perspectives and experiences can contribute much to our understanding and knowledge of local, national, and worldwide health practices.

Voluntary Participation
Participation at every phase of the research is entirely voluntary, and participants can withdraw at any time. The survey and interview questions will ask about your personal experiences in pregnancy, birth, and/or postpartum and because these questions include private topics, you are welcome to share as much, or as little information as you feel comfortable. You may choose to answer all questions, or some questions, or no questions.

Procedures

The studies begin with a survey containing questions about broad areas of your life experience, including family structure, education, employment, activities, recreation, and etc. The survey questionnaire will also ask about your pregnancy and/or birth experience, as well as the support services offered to you.

These questions help the researchers to better understand the context of your experiences. Some surveys will be followed by a qualitative interview where the researcher may ask for more explanation about your birth and/or postpartum experiences, to learn more about the emotional quality and themes of your experience. These interviews may last between 1 and 1.5 hours, and may be scheduled at a mutually agreed upon time and format (video/phone call or in-person), and will be recorded for transcription.

Some interviews may be followed by focus group discussions where participants may discuss their pregnancy, birth, and/or postpartum experiences together with a small group of other study participants. The group format allows researchers to identify parts of the pregnancy, birth, and postpartum recovery experience that are shared; we may also talk about community practices that support maternal mental health These focus group discussions will be guided by a research team member or myself, they may be 1.5-2 hours each, and may be hosted on video chat or in-person.

The experiment phase looks at which birth preparation classes are most effective at helping participants prevent birth and postpartum challenges. This phase includes a birth preparation class, delivered in group format, over an online course portal, offering trauma-informed childbirth education from multiple perspectives. Participants are assigned randomly to one of several evidence-based childbirth preparation courses. Courses vary in length from 6 – 12 weeks, but contain the same childbirth preparation information, delivered in different perspectives and with different methodologies. Participants are interviewed at the beginning of the study, then they complete several introductory assessments, then they complete the coursework, then are interviewed after their birth experiences at 2 weeks postpartum to complete a follow-up assessment, and again at 8 weeks postpartum.

The interview and focus group discussions will take place in a private online or in-person setting, and no one else but the people who take part in the discussion and guide or myself will be present during these discussions. The entire discussion will be recorded, then de-identified to protect your privacy. The information recorded is confidential, and no one else except the primary researcher and research assistant will have access to the recordings. The de-identified recordings may be used within The Stelter Institute for research and educational purposes.

Risks

There is a risk that you may share some personal or confidential information by chance, or that you may feel uncomfortable talking about some of the topics. However, we do not wish for this to happen. You do not have to answer any question or take part in the discussion/interview/survey if you feel the question(s) are too personal or if talking about them makes you uncomfortable. Sometimes participants begin talking about their pregnancy, birth, and/or postpartum recovery experiences and discover that they need to continue talking with a professional mental healthcare provider about aspects of their experiences. If you indicate that you need or prefer to be referred to a counselor or mental healthcare provider, we will direct you to a qualified counselor in your area. You may choose to continue or discontinue in the study. Participants who experience severe dysregulation while participating in the study may be referred to emergency mental healthcare services.

Benefits

Benefits you may experience can include the feelings of relief at being heard, clarity in understanding your circumstance from different perspectives, and the feeling of solidarity from talking with other people who have experienced similar pregnancy, birth, and postpartum recovery elements.

Benefits to the community may include greater awareness of the emotional, physical, practical, and social elements of the significant maternal population. This information can inform hospital/birthplace personnel, government leaders, educators, and general population members about the assumptions they make regarding women's mental health, and the accuracy or inaccuracy of those assumptions.

Confidentiality
Participant's names and contact details are collected as a safety feature, so that referrals can be made to support mental health professionals if needed. The name and contact details are separated from participant comments, and are maintained in a secure file in a locked office, accessible only to the primary researcher and research assistant. Participant comments and recordings, in their de-identified (or anonymous) condition may be collated into scientific tables and descriptions, for publication in scientific or industry publications. These comments will not be connected to participant names, therefore, you may feel free to speak comfortably, knowing that your comments will be anonymous.

The following applies to focus groups:
Focus groups provide a particular challenge to confidentiality because once something is said in the group it becomes common knowledge. At the beginning of group discussions, we will explain to the group that confidentiality and privacy are of the highest importance, and will ask that participants ensure that they are participating from a private location, and that they respect the group by not talking about topics and experiences outside of the group. Although we will remind the group at the beginning of each discussion, we cannot guarantee confidentiality.

Sharing the Results
Nothing that you tell us today will be attributed to you by name. The knowledge that we get from this research will be shared with you and your community before it is made widely available to the public. Each participant will receive a summary of the results. There will also be small meetings in the community and these will be announced. Following the meetings, we will publish the results so that other interested people may learn from the research.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw
You do not have to take part in this research if you do not wish to do so, and choosing to participate will not affect your access to healthcare, employment or other community services. You may stop participating in the study at any time that you wish. I will give you an opportunity at the end of the interview/discussion to review your remarks, and you can ask to modify or remove portions of those, if you do not agree with my notes or if I did not understand you correctly.

Who to Contact
If you have any questions, you can ask them now or later. If you wish to ask questions later, you may contact any of the following:
Mary C. Stelter, PsyD
drmarystelter@gmail.com
310-462-5218

Part II: Certificate of Consent

I have been invited to participate in research about maternal mental health, or experiences during the pregnancy, birth, and/or postpartum period; and about local health practices and services supporting maternal mental health.

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it, and any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Name of Participant (print)

Signature of Participant

Date _____
Day/month/year

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY
A copy of this informed consent form has been provided to the participant.

Name of Researcher/person taking the consent

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent

Date _____
Day/month/year