

Maternal Mental Health Screening through WIC Services

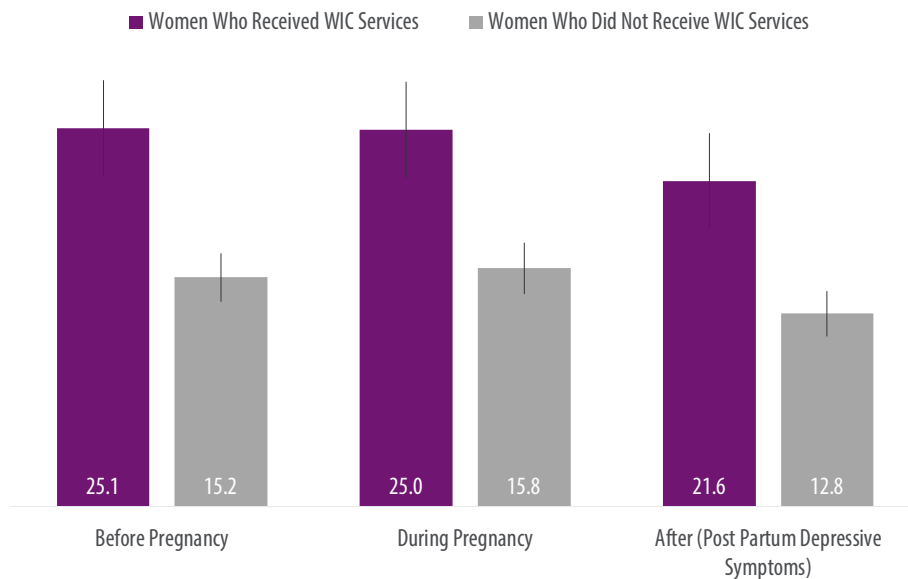
The consequences of poor maternal mental health are well documented and mental health screening recommendations are widely available for obstetric and pediatric care settings. However, women are often not screened because of socioeconomic barriers that prevent them from receiving routine healthcare for themselves and their newborns.¹ The Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program addresses these barriers by providing health screenings, education, and referrals to resources.²⁻³ Although WIC clinics provide an ideal setting for maternal mental health screening, Utah WIC clinic staff do not routinely receive training on standardized mental health screening methods.

Data from the Utah Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS) indicate depression rates before, during, and after pregnancy were higher among women who received WIC services when compared to women who did not receive WIC services during 2016–2018 (Figure 1).⁴

Findings from PRAMS data prompted the development and implementation of a maternal mental health education/training initiative targeting Utah WIC staff and WIC clients. The objective for this initiative is to increase the number of women screened and referred to appropriate mental health services and to empower WIC staff to serve as a local resource on maternal mental health.

Maternal Depression in Utah, 2016–2018

Figure 1. The percentage of women with self-reported depression before, during, and after pregnancy was higher among women who received WIC services.



1. Linking MCH and WIC: Integrating perinatal depression screening and prevention for high risk women, Huynh-Nhu Le, 2010. (HRSA funded project) mchb.hrsa.gov/research/project_info.asp?ID=143.
2. Supporting Maternal Mental Health in Public Health Nutrition Practice, Association of State Public Health Nutritionists (ASPHN) Fall Brief, 2017, p.12.
3. USDA: wicworks.fns.usda.gov/resources/wic-guidance-screening-and-referring-women-or-risk-depression.
4. Utah Department of Health PRAMS website: mihp.utah.gov/pregnancy-and-risk-assessment.