

Study on Use of Maternal Opioid Misuse Treatments to Decrease NAS Infants
Born

Rachel Wilder

SOC/CRM 496: Public Sociology & Criminology Practicum (Spring 2018)

Background. Does the use of opioid misuse treatments decrease rates of infants born with neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS)? Wilmington, North Carolina has experienced an influx of children in the foster care system, with an average of 334 children in foster care in New Hanover County, 119 in Brunswick County, and 52 children in Pender County (Barnes, 2017). According to the Department of Social Services, over 100 of the children in New Hanover are in foster care because of the opioid epidemic (Schachtman, 2017). In 2016, over 2 million Americans misused prescription opioids (Hall, Wilfong, Heubner, Posze, & Willauer, 2016). This research study attempted to find out if mothers getting treatment results in less NAS babies born, by collecting and analyzing existing statistics from the New Hanover Regional Medical Center (NHRMC).

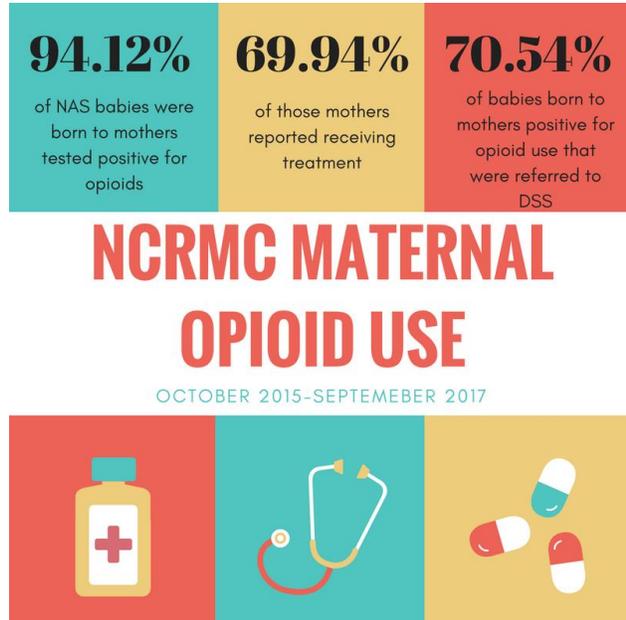
Methods. This research includes data gathered from New Hanover Regional Medical Center on NAS babies born October 2015 through September 2017. To answer the question of whether or not the use of opioid misuse treatments increase reunification rate between maternal opioid misusers and children placed in foster care, quantitative methods were used by collecting existing

statistics from the NHRMC and analyzing the amount of NAS babies born October 2015 through September 2017, the amount of mothers tested positive for opioid use, the number of Department of Social Services (DSS) referrals, and the number of mothers that reported being in opioid misuse treatment.

Results. Of the New Hanover Regional

Figure 1

Medical Center NAS babies born between October 2015 and September 2017, 94.12% of their mothers tested positive for opioids, and 69.64% of those mothers reported receiving treatment. Of the NAS babies born to mothers that tested positive for opioids, 70.54% were referred to DSS (Figure 1).

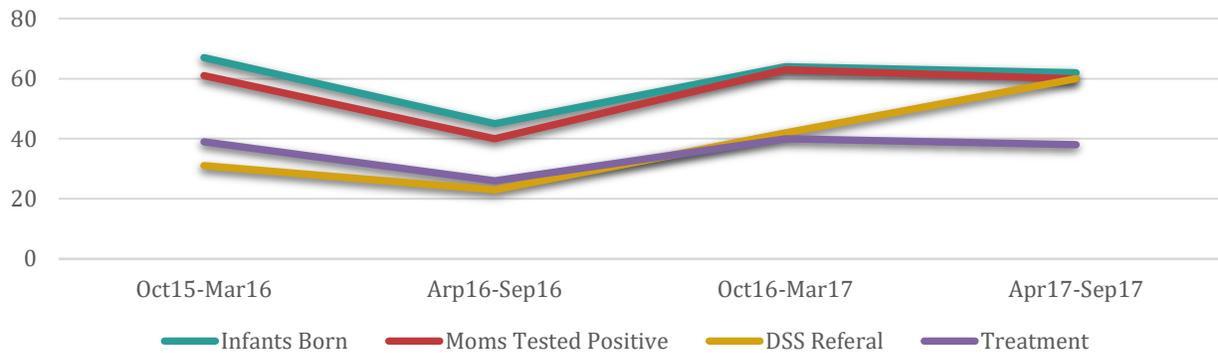


Source: NHRMC

As shown on figure 2, which comes from NHRMC, as the amount of infants born rises, the amount of moms tested positive rose almost at the same rate. Once the data reaches October 2016-March 2017, however, the number of infants born remains the same, while the number of moms who tested positive declines, as shown on Figure 2. Meanwhile, as infants born and moms who tested positive rose, treatment also rose at a very similar rate, alongside DSS referral. It can be inferred that mothers tested positive are being referred to DSS, and since there is a steady plateau in infants born and treatment from October 2016-March 2017

in Figure 2, and a decline in moms who tested positive for opioids, the reason may be due to the substance abuse treatments that mothers are getting may be working.

Figure 2: Total Number of NAS Infants Born and Maternal Opioid Use, DSS Referral, and Treatment



Source: NHRMC

Discussion. I did not get as much data for this study as I had anticipated. I would have like to use the two surveys to connect the statistics found with statistics from the NHRMC and treatment centers.

A surprising finding, which emerged between April 2016 and September 2017, is that DSS referral rose, while mothers who tested positive stayed at a plateau. Further research can be done to see what else could result in DSS referral.

The data gathered supports prior literature on opioid abuse treatment. The data shows with treatment, fewer infants are born with mothers who are tested positive for opioids. The hypothesis is that opioid misuse treatments will decrease rates of NAS babies born is partially confirmed.

References.

Barnes, G. (2017). *Advocate: North Carolina faces foster care crisis*. [online]

Wilmington Star News. Available at:

<http://www.starnewsonline.com/news/20170927/advocate-north-carolina-faces-foster-care-crisis>.

Hall M., Wilfong, J., Huebner, R., Posze, L. and Willauer, T. (2016). Medication-Assisted Treatment Improves Child Permanency Outcomes for Opioid-Using Families in the Child Welfare System. *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, 71, pp.63-67.

Schachtman, B. (2017). *Taking babies from mommies – Opioids' impact on families* | *Port City Daily*. [online] Port City Daily. Available at:

<https://portcitydaily.com/2017/03/24/health-opioids-wilmington-children-of-epidemic-surprising-cHall-et-al.,enges-light-at-the-end-of-the-tunnel/>.

Resources.

North Carolina Harm Reduction Coalition. <http://www.nchrc.org/>. (336) 543-8050.

New Hanover Regional Medical Center. <https://www.nhrmc.org/>. (910) 667-7000.