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Background

Up to 1 in 5 women will experience a perinatal mood disorder or substance use disorder during pregnancy or the first year following pregnancy. (Gavin, 2005, Fawcett, 2019). Additionally, those from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds are at particular risk for perinatal mood disorders (Masters, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the risk of mental health issues during the perinatal period (Berthelot, 2020).

At Boston Medical Center, the largest safety net hospital in New England, the obstetrics-psychiatry clinic transitioned to telehealth visits during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this rapid transition and expansion of telehealth during this time, there is limited information regarding the use of telehealth for perinatal patients during the COVID pandemic. This allowed for a unique opportunity to better understand its role for this specific patient population.

Objective

The goal of this research was to identify (1) potential benefits of telehealth for perinatal patients (2) barriers of telehealth for this population, and (3) patient preferences regarding the continuation of telehealth post-pandemic.

Methods



Participants

- Adult women seen by an obstetrics-psychiatry clinic provider between 10/1/2019 and 1/20/2021
- Diagnosed with: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Major Depressive Disorder, Anxiety Disorder (unspecified), Depressive Disorder (unspecified), or Adjustment Disorder
- Fluent in English, cognitively unimpaired



Interviews

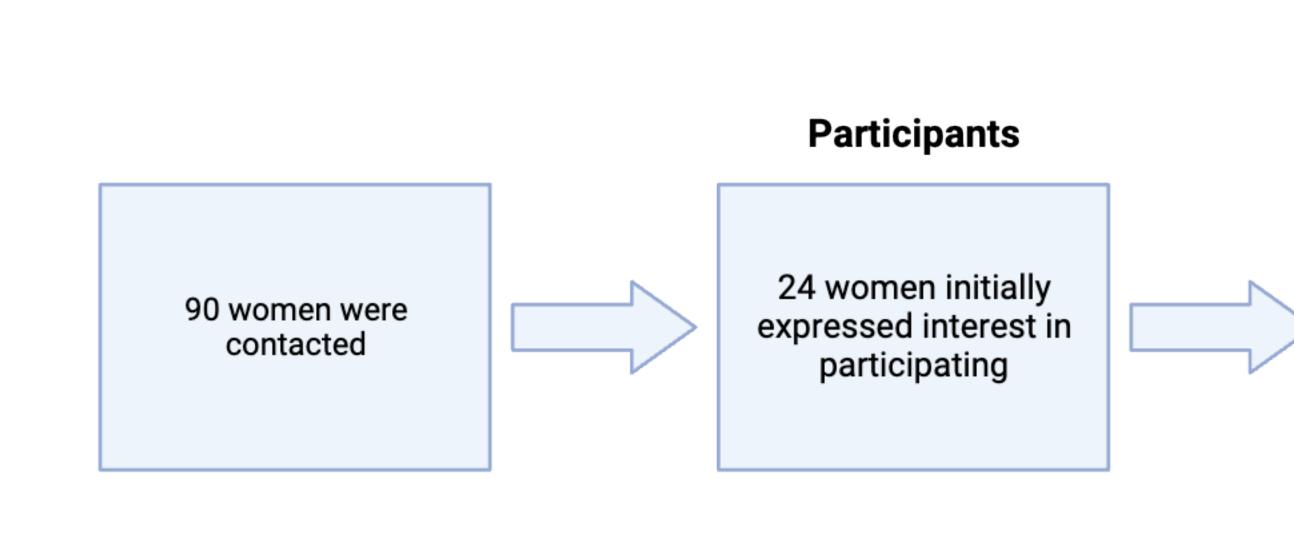
- A list was generated of those who met inclusion criteria (n = 90)
- Semi-structured, qualitative interview consisted of open-ended questions and topics to facilitate discussion regarding patient's experience with in person vs telehealth appointments
- Interviews were recorded



Rapid Analysis

- Performed by four members of the study team, with each interview being reviewed by two members
- Palinkas et al. (2019) found consistent results between rapid analysis compared to traditional, in-depth analysis
- Allowed for more timely results to be shared regarding the use of telehealth during the pandemic

The Role of Telehealth in an Obstetric-Psychiatry Clinic: **Patient Perceptions**



Efficiency

Travel

- Most discussed the convenience of not having to travel
 - very important"

Childcare

- Telehealth can make childcare easier "It's hard to go anywhere with a baby"
- Telehelath does not necessarily eliminate childcare issues "my baby was young so he was all over me"

Wait Times

- Telehealth allowed for avoidance of long check-in processes and wait times
- Most felt providers were more likely to start on time with telehealth appointments One participant thought telehealth was less likely to start on time

Privacy

- appointments
- Some mentioned challenges finding privacy at home including:
 - having children around
 - needing to do the appointment in their car
 - finding space at their office when they returned to work
 - providers being able to see inside their home

Technology

- Most reported no internet or cell service issues for their phone or video appointment
 - Some reported issues with video, resulting in frustration and causing them to switch to their phone
 - Poor cell reception was highlighted during the study
- A couple participants felt that it was difficult to connect with their provider over the phone
 - "What one person might be saying you can hear it differently"

Future

- Opinions were mixed regarding continuing telehealth in the future
 - Most noted that telehealth is more convenient
- Some found it harder to be open and focused
- First appointment with a psychiatric provider: in person appointments were preferred

Results	
12 women completed the interview and the demographic form	

Themes

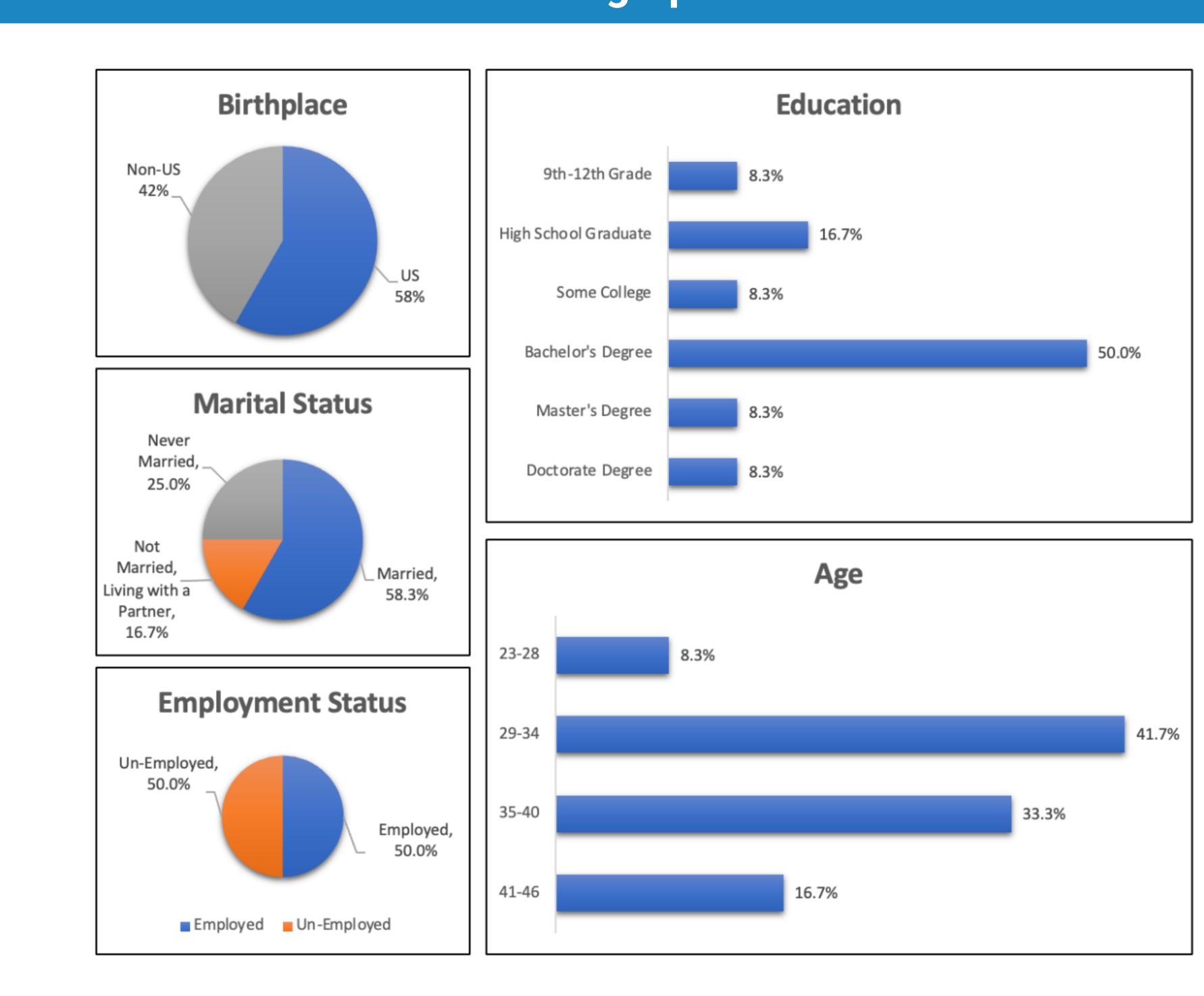
[•] "I don't have to drive, go find a parking spot, sometimes those things get in the way of me making it to an appointment" "Not having to come into the hospital with a newborn while I was healing from vaginal stitches after delivery was very,

• Many felt more comfortable within their own home and did not have issues finding private areas for their telehealth

• Overall, an important factor in determining the success of their treatment was having a good relationship with the provider



EXCEPTIONAL CARE. WITHOUT EXCEPTION.



Demographics

Conclusion

Participants highlighted many conveniences of telehealth including eliminating transportation issues, lessening wait times for providers, and reducing childcare needs. However, participants also raised some concerns regarding having adequate privacy and a satisfactory phone or video connection.

Considering these advantages and disadvantages, many participants advocated for the need for flexibility in the future. The availability of either in person or telehealth appointments may help address the varying needs of perinatal patients.

References

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