Introduction

• Newborn Intensive Care Units (NICU) aim to care for babies in need of critical care. Literature suggests that parents of NICU children are more likely to experience increased anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and overall declines in mental health (Bernardo et al., 2021).
• Online databases are relatively new, and for many patients, there is a lack of understanding of how to utilize them effectively.
• The purpose of this study is to examine the NICU experience from a caregiver’s perspective and construct a website containing mental health resources based on identified needs.

Methods

Research Question: Parents of children in the NICU often struggle with anxiety and mental health issues. Does the creation and use of an online mental health resource promote NICU parent’s mental health and well-being?

Eligibility: Any caregiver whose child resided in the NICU after birth 2. English is their primary language

Participants for this study were contacted through a non-probabilistic sampling technique. The invitation to participate included: Project overview, background information, primary investigator contact information, steps to schedule an interview, and confidentiality protection details

Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the program NVivo. The theme analysis included a practice approach and established codes created during the project’s early stages. The themes were developed into categories, which were used to answer the research question.

Results

Each caregiver was asked a series of eleven questions. 73% of the questions were asked using a Likert scale, and 18% of the interview questions were open-ended. The results from the Likert Scale questions are described in Figure 1. The open-ended questions focused on the NICU experience unique to each caregiver.

Open-ended questions
• Describe your NICU experience; 69.2% mentioned feeling overwhelmed, stressed, and/or anxious.
• Describe your transition from hospital to home; 54% of caregivers did not respond to this question as they were still in the NICU on the interview date. 83.3% of participants recalled feeling overwhelmed, stressed, and/or anxious during the transition.
• Is there anything you would change about your experience? Responses varied, but individuals commonly mentioned something to help them “get their bearings” or “know where things are” within the NICU space.

Discussion

This study exhibited favorable findings and responses from each initial interview guided the content chosen for the NICU caregiver online resource: Major themes included:

• On the Likert Scale questions, participants strongly agreed or agreed on feeling overwhelmed, stressed, and/or anxious during the NICU stay. 69.2% of parents used words such as emotional, tiring, depression, overwhelming, stress, and anxiety when asked to describe their NICU experience. Of those participants, 89% reported less than acceptable emotional well-being.
• Two to five weeks following participant interviews, each caregiver received a link to the NICU Caregiver Resource and Qualities survey.
• Once the participant completed this process, each individual completed an anonymous brief five-question post-survey.
• The survey was multiple choice using a Likert scale format and results of the post-survey questions are described in Figure 2.

Conclusion

The results of this study revealed the adverse effects the NICU environment can have on a parent’s mental health and overall well-being. The study presents practical implications to address the mental health needs of this population—the incorporation of mental health screenings, exit counseling, and increasing accessibility to resources will further promote NICU parent mental health. Continuation of advocacy for resources and support is essential to serve this population best.

Acknowledgement & Contact information

A special thank you to Dr. Peralta-Carellen, UAB Newborn Follow-up Clinic, and UAB Women and Infant’s Center for allowing me to learn and connect with NICU parents. A huge thank you to Vivian Williams and Rachel Deck for allowing me to observe occupational therapy within the NICU. Another special thanks to Valley McCurry for providing me with exceptional guidance and mentorship throughout the capstone experience.

For more information or further questions please email Eleeesa2@gmail.com

References


To visit the website, scan the QR code here!