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## Perinatal mental health literacy, practices and needs among maternal healthcare professionals in the United Arab Emirates: A qualitative study

**Statement of the Problem:** Despite its relevance among healthcare professionals, UAE research on perinatal mental health literacy (PMHL) and practice is scarce. This study examines healthcare professionals' perceptions on perinatal mental health literacy, factors that affect their practice and the needs for improving the health services among perinatal healthcare providers.

**Methodology & Theoretical Orientation:** This qualitative study was done in Al Ain, UAE, from May to November 2023. Purposive and snowball sampling recruited 42 HCPs from education and healthcare settings. Participants had to be 25 years old, work in Al Ain for two years, and have a diploma, bachelor's, or postgraduate degree in nursing, midwifery, obstetrics, family medicine, paediatrics, psychiatry, or psychology. Thematic analysis was used to analyse three focus groups and 28 semi-structured in-person and online interviews.

**Findings:** Three primary themes were identified: 1 Knowledge and Awareness, in which participants demonstrated varying degrees of understanding of perinatal mental health conditions, with their perspectives influenced by their perceptions of normalcy and the sources of information they accessed during the perinatal period.

2 Attitudes and Beliefs, which underscored a persistent stigma surrounding mental health, which was further exacerbated by

cultural and social factors that influenced the perspectives of healthcare professionals 3 Support Systems, which focused on the healthcare system's issues, such as barriers to delivering perinatal mental health treatment and the coping methods that professionals use to overcome these barriers.

**Conclusion & Significance:** The research results indicate critical areas for improving the perinatal mental health literacy and practices of maternal healthcare professionals in the UAE. It underscores the importance of a structured approach to PMH practices, improved training, and organizational support.

### Biography

Rouwida is a Ph.D. candidate at the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), specializing in Perinatal mental health literacy. With 17 years of experience in nursing and health literacy education, she has established herself as a versatile professional with expertise spanning multiple fields. Rouwida holds a Master's in Human Resources Management from the University of Abu Dhabi and a Bachelor of Nursing from Makassed High National College of Nursing, Beirut. She is also an International Board-Certified Lactation Consultant since 2005. Throughout her career, she has earned recognition for her academic contributions, including her role as an Adjunct Lecturer at Griffith University and her leadership in accreditation at Fatima College of Health Sciences. Her achievements extend to collaborating with McGraw Hill Education on health literacy textbooks and supporting the UAE Lactation Consultant Association. Rouwida's diverse skills encompass academic teaching, project management, and lactation management, making her a respected figure in health and education.

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