

IRGF Final Report

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Project Title: The Narrative Experiences of Mothers Impacted by Birth Alerts: An Exploratory Study

1.1 Project Summary

This is a qualitative study exploring the experiences of mothers who were subject to birth alerts within the Alberta child welfare system. It is only the second study in Canada around this experience, the other being in British Columbia. In this work, mothers spoke about the emotional toll of this intervention. They also spoke about the emotional legacy such as the ongoing worry that child welfare will again appear in their lives leading to heightened vigilance. This research is continuing.

1.2 Student involvement

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1.3 Dissemination and Knowledge Mobilization

The work continues but preliminary results were presented in Spring 2026 at the Prairie Child Welfare Consortium conference in Edmonton, AB. Elke, D., Choate, P., & Tortorelli, C. (2025). A scoping review of birth alerts: A Canadian context. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 55(4), 1636–1656. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcaf014>

1.4 Project Outcomes and Impacts

This project continues with a follow up grant. Themes thus far: 1. Consequences of birth alerts Strong feelings of grief particularly with apprehension Some results suggest mothers had worse mental health outcomes than if the child had died due to ambiguous grief 2. Racial bias and anti-oppressive practice Racial inequities specifically for Indigenous children Reinforces the already practice of over surveillance of Indigenous mothers (MMIWG) 3. Public health v criminalization A criminalization approach deters mothers from accessing resources out of fear for criminal prosecution and/or child welfare involvement Public health perspective offers supportive and preventive measures and is the trauma informed preferred and effective approach 4. Improved collaboration and training for services providers Health care and child welfare are complex systems lacking appropriate mechanisms for inter-professional collaboration Mandates and policies are mis-aligned Inter-disciplinary training is required to improve the situation.