

Title: Family Involvement in Informed Consent

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Description: As principal investigator of a study on Mexican-American women and postpartum depression, you learn that many potential study participants want to discuss the study with their husbands before signing a consent form.

Headings: Special Populations and Cultural Competence; Racial and ethnic minorities; Informed Consent: Disclosure and Deception; Other informed consent issues

Case Type: Decision making

Family Involvement in Informed Consent

You are the principal investigator of a study on postpartum depression that will include in-depth open-ended interviews with women who are recent immigrants from Mexico (have immigrated within the past 10 years) and first generation Mexican-American women who have been diagnosed with moderate postpartum depression. The informed consent process and all interviews will be conducted in Spanish by a Latina co-investigator who is a 2nd generation Mexican-American and has extensive experience working with this population in research and outreach settings.

The interview will include sensitive questions regarding depression, anxiety, confusion, suicidal ideation, and thoughts about motherhood. However, the sensitivity of the research topic does not seem to be a major barrier to recruiting participants. Approximately 20 women have responded to flyers that have been placed in a community mental health clinic, but only 3 have been enrolled. In many cases, after the study has been explained and participants are asked to sign the consent form, many have said either, "I have to ask my husband first before I sign anything" and then do not return to the clinic with the signed form, or, "I don't think my husband would like me to participate in this study." When asked why, many participants (especially the more recent immigrants) remarked that generally they do not sign any forms without first discussing the matter with their spouses. Several potential participants also mentioned that because the topic involves not just themselves but their child and family, they do not feel comfortable excluding their husbands from the decision.

Should you (and if so, to what extent) involve husbands in the informed consent process?