

BACKGROUND

- In Newfoundland & Labrador, Canada, the response to the COVID-19 pandemic was like the international response, with lockdowns, social distancing, and masking mandates.
- In hospitals, there was an initial policy of no visitors including no support people in labour & delivery, followed by gradual loosening of restrictions to allow them to be present at birth, then on the postpartum ward.

OBJECTIVE

- To describe the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on the pregnancy experience of women attending for delivery in St. John's, Newfoundland & Labrador, Canada.



METHODS

- Mixed methods design using an explanatory sequential design



Quantitative Phase

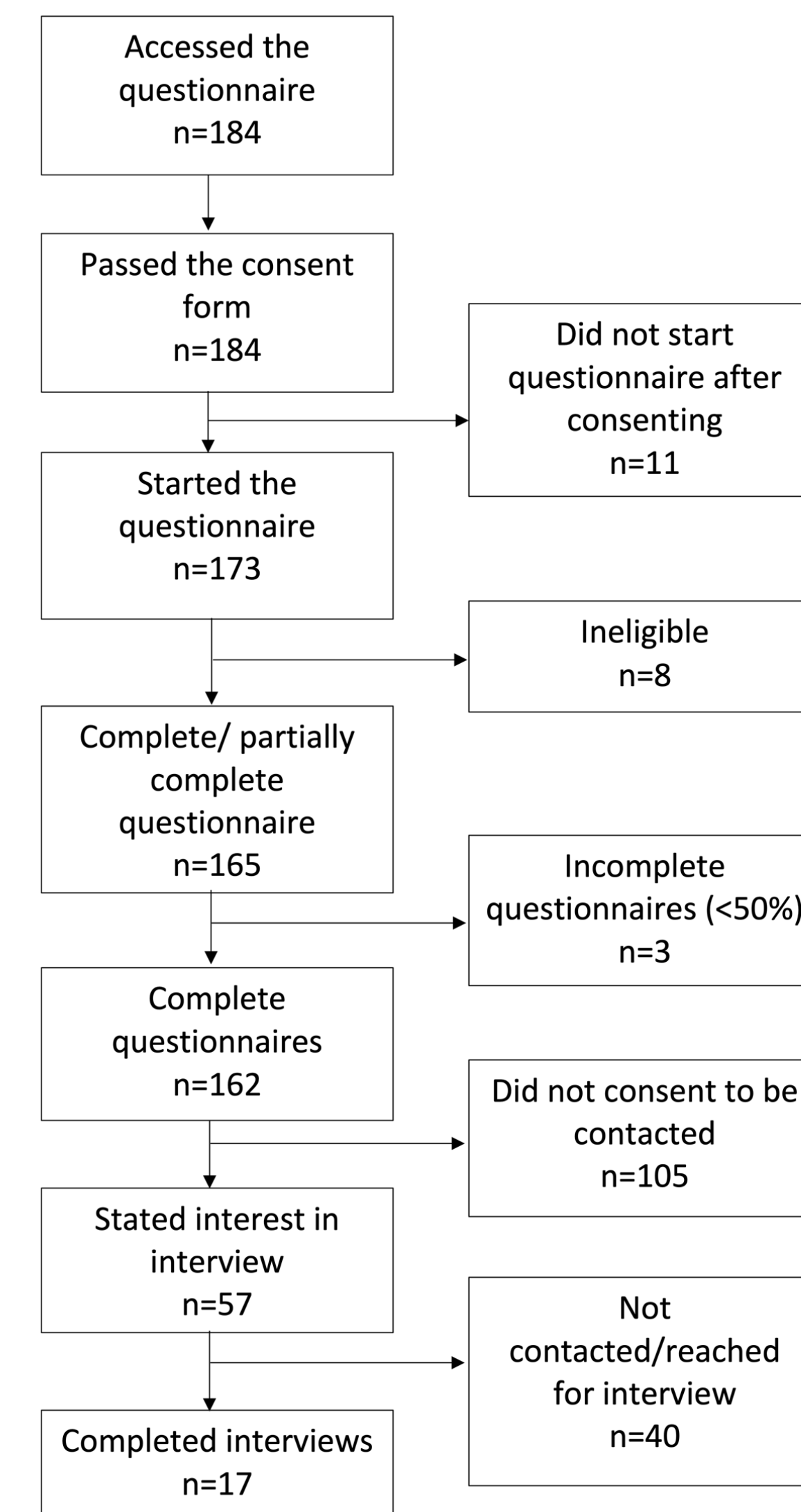
- Recruited women attending for prenatal and postpartum care in St. John's, Newfoundland from March 2020 until July 2021.
- Online questionnaire (Qualtrics XM):
 - Demographic and general pregnancy information
 - Experiences with COVID-19 in general
 - The impact of COVID-19 on pregnancy

Qualitative Phase

- A sample of participants obtained from the survey were contacted via email or telephone.
- Semi-structured interviews (Zoom or telephone):
 - Prenatal care experiences and birth plans
 - Labour & delivery experiences and concerns
 - Postpartum period
 - Impact of social distancing and isolation
 - Impact of hospital-imposed restrictions

RESULTS

Figure 1: Participant study flow

**Table 1:** Participant demographics

	%
Antepartum	71.0
Postpartum	29.0
Age Group (by years)	
16-20	0.62
21-25	9.88
26-30	35.19
31-35	38.27
36-40	14.81
41-45	1.23
Gravity	
1	42.24
2	29.81
≥3	27.95
Parity	
Nulliparous	40.63
Multiparous	59.38
Employment Status	
Employed Pre-Covid	96.27
Employed During Covid	85.09
Household Income (\$CAD)	
≤\$39, 999	8.13
\$40,000 - 69,999	10.63
\$70,000 – 99,999	23.75
≥\$100,000	57.50
Pre-existing psychiatric condition	21.74
Pre-existing medical condition	16.05

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

Table 2: Responses to selected survey questions

Question	Response
How worried are you about contracting/getting COVID-19 in the community?	62.26% worried to very worried
How worried are you about contracting/getting COVID-19 at the hospital?	45.22% worried to very worried
How worried are you or have you been about someone you live with getting/contracting COVID-19?	63.16% worried to very worried
If you were not pregnant, would your worry about getting COVID-19 be?	73.29% would be less worried
Do you think the restrictions/regulations as it pertained to prenatal care, imposed by the health authority was reasonable?	50.93% did not think they were reasonable
Was there ever a time during your pregnancy when you thought about going to the Case Room for assessment but DID NOT because of COVID-19?	8.13% said yes
Has COVID-19 affected your plans for future pregnancy?	8.75% said yes ; 17.59% were unsure

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Three main themes:



Anxiety regarding the impact of restrictions on the intrapartum experience



Figure 2: Word Cloud

Quotes:

"This is something I really want to get into: breastfeeding and breastfeeding support. And I guess how breastfeeding is impacted by the one visitor rule or the partner having to leave rule. I wouldn't have survived without having my partner there. And my breastfeeding rights would have been completely violated by that rule."

"... just increased general anxiety overall, I guess, just general concern about as it was somewhat unknown, the effects of COVID on pregnancy."

"I didn't mind the rules. I'd rather be safe, I'd rather be protected. So, it was just more so about the consistency and the science behind some of the rules at the time. And maybe that was the communication thing. It could have been explained better. It's hard to know."

DISCUSSION

Connecting the quantitative and qualitative results

- Majority of patients were antepartum, and consistent with qualitative analysis showing:
 - Anxiety in the intrapartum experience and worry about the presence of partners
 - Concern about support in the post-partum period in general, and breastfeeding support in particular
- Majority of participants had household income >\$70,000/year, with 57% over \$100,000/year
 - Concerns voiced were specific to this demographic, in contrast with previous studies demonstrating increased food insecurity in other populations
- Half of participants did not think hospital restrictions were reasonable
 - Interviews found that participants were confused and frustrated by poor communication; perceived lack of scientific rationale; and frequent changes to recommendations

CONCLUSIONS

- At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic pregnant and post-partum women in NL endorse
 - Anxiety about the impact the hospital restrictions
 - Concerns about support in the postpartum period and breastfeeding
 - Increased stress related to prenatal care and their partners involvement
- This is consistent with the literature and hopefully will guide future policy