

## **Mentalisation amongst Maternal and Child Health Nurses using the Newborn Behavioural Observations with Infant-Mother Dyads: A Qualitative Study**

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Maternal and Child Health Nurses (MCHNs) provide wellbeing and developmental support to families with infants up to age five; support which often extends to infant-caregiver relational support with a view to optimising development. The Newborn Behavioural Observations (NBO) is a brief and cost-effective relational tool for professionals working with infants from birth through to 3 months of age. The efficacy of the NBO in enhancing infant-caregiver interactions is evident in the current literature. However, research exploring practitioners' experience of the NBO is limited, particularly regarding practitioner mentalisation and perceived effects on practice. This study explored MCHNs' mentalisation towards infant-mother dyads when using the NBO in practice. Ten Victorian MCHNs (female; aged 31-66 years), who had used the NBO clinically within the last 12 months, were recruited from a database of NBO-trained practitioners. Interpretative phenomenological analysis of one-on-one semi-structured interviews explored MCHNs experiential meaning-making. MCHNs reported that the NBO's focus on the pre-verbal infant provided them with an added dynamic to consultations outside of the practitioner-caregiver relationship. Thus, they were able to provide holistic and collaborative support to infant-mother dyads. Emotional satisfaction and pride in profession were also reported; in current literature, these factors have been found to reduce burnout in primary care providers. This study's findings illustrate the NBO's potential benefits to Australian child and family health nursing practice as well as other primary care providers who offer infant mental health and relationship support as part of their work with families in the first three months. The NBO appears to offer a framework and confidence to practitioners to apply infant mental health theory practically. It also provides a means to shift from prescriptive to mentalisation-based, infant-inclusive, and individualised practice.