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Expectant father's attitude towards childbirth: A little attitude makes a big difference in delivery suite

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ABSTRACT

Background: An expectant father's support during childbirth is vital to a parturient woman's emotional well-being. Studies suggested that this type of support enables a woman to feel more comfort during labor by reducing maternal anxiety during childbirth. **Materials and Methods:** Descriptive study design with convenience sampling was adopted for this study. The data were collected for a period of 2 months (July 1, 2009 to August 30 2009) from 40 expectant fathers of low risk primigravida women not having any complications and waiting for normal vaginal delivery. The study was conducted in a private hospital, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. The attitude of expectant fathers was checked by using self-structured attitude scale contains 16 items.

Results: The study findings revealed, the expectant fathers were scared about childbirth experience and they perceived it was more painful. The participants agreed that they were the best choice for the mother during delivery ($P < 0.0001$). The expectant fathers were reported that the mother should acquire the tender loving care provided by their partner during delivery ($P < 0.0001$), and also the pain relief methods ($P < 0.0001$) also essential during delivery to have successful perinatal outcome. **Conclusion:** The results revealed that the presence of expectant father provided more comfort and also shared the opinion about pain as well as suffering that occur during childbirth. These findings were strongly recommended in prenatal counseling to the couples, as an additional support and care which can be implemented during childbirth.

KEY WORDS: Attitude, childbirth, expectant father

INTRODUCTION

Currently accepted means of maternal health is to provide promotive, preventive, curative and rehabilitative health care for mothers [1]. Parenting is one of the maturational milestones of adult life that can be anxious but also pleasing, where the women prepares for a new level of caring and responsibility [2]. The child bearing period is a one time experience that never returns to another which incorporates a profound and powerful human experience [3]. Natural child birth is a powerful human experience which is the mixture of feeling of empowerment, elation, and accomplishment [4]. Pregnancy and childbirth is accompanied with physical and physiological changes, it may leads to emotional changes where need of caregiver supports play a vital role in this life time events [5].

The aspect of childbirth has changed dramatically over the years due to the presence of men in the delivery suite. This is now common because majority of women choosing their life partner needs to be there, at the time of giving birth to a baby. Choosing life partner as birth partner also has an advantage that they have been experience the pregnancy and associated events, through which they may comfortable enough with birth plan. Expectant father can be act as a confident guide during uterine contractions [6].

In a review study conducted by Hodnett *et al.*, (2011) reported that women allocated to continuous support by their partner were more likely to have a spontaneous vaginal birth (respiratory rate [RR] 1.08, 95% confidence interval [CI] 1.04 to 1.12) and less likely to have intrapartum analgesia (RR 0.90, 95% CI 0.84 to 0.97). In addition their duration of labor were shorter (mean

difference -0.58 h, 95% CI -0.86 to -0.30), they were less likely to have a caesarean (RR 0.79, 95% CI 0.67 to 0.92) or instrumental vaginal birth (fixed-effect, RR 0.90, 95% CI 0.84 to 0.96) or a baby with a low 5-min Apgar score (fixed-effect, RR 0.70, 95% CI 0.50 to 0.96) [7].

Exploring the experiences as well as the views of men who had attended the birth of their children declared that his role is vital to the laboring women for giving emotional support and care. Traditionally women were supported by another woman during labor and childbirth. The insights drawn from the male partner's views and experiences could enhance the current woman-centered midwifery model that encompasses the needs of the baby, the women family and other people important to the woman [8].

The objective of this study was to detect whether expectant fathers genuinely want to be present at the birth and know their opinion about birth participation. It also aimed to determine their involvement in care of mother and baby after birth.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Descriptive research design was carried among expectant fathers of low risk primigravida women admitted in KG Hospital, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, South India. The particular hospital was purposively chosen because they allowed expectant father during labor and birth. Data collection was done for a period of 2 months from July 1, 2009 to August 30, 2009. Fifty two married expectant fathers and living together with their partner were recruited by using convenience sampling technique, eight participants were withdrawn from the study due to obligatory personal/official work and four expectant fathers were excluded because the mother was identified as high risk case. The remaining 40 expectant fathers were participated till the end of the study. The independent variable of this study was presence of expectant father during labor and the dependent variable was perception of labor as well as attitude of expectant father. This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee (protocol no: 2009/MSN/KG/046) of concerned hospital. Participants completed informed written consent form. Each participant was assigned an identification code, ensuring data set anonymity. They were informed about, could withdraw from the study at any point.

Data Analysis

The retrieved data were organized and prepared in Microsoft excel. Mean and percentage distribution of sample characteristics were analyzed by using descriptive statistics. Difference in attitude of expectant fathers before and after birth participation was analyzed by paired *t*-test from "QuickCalc" scientific software. The level of confidence was set to 95%.

Measures

The data collection tools used for this study has three sections like demographic profile of the expectant father consist of five items, obstetric profile includes eight items but it was collected to screen the mothers under high risk cases. Third one is self-structured attitude scale contains 16 items. The present study excluded

four participants after their preliminary screening because the women were having high risk for normal vaginal delivery. Attitudes were measured using the self-structured rating scale, which was developed on the basis of previous studies and experts. Nine experts evaluated the scale and changes were made on the basis of their suggestions. The pre-test was performed in July 2009. Minor changes such as alterations to the wording were made to the scale on the basis of the pre-test ($n = 10$ expectant fathers). The respondents reported that there were no ambiguous questions in the scale and it took approximately 20 min to complete the form. The scale consists of 16 items and it was divided under four categories like attitude regarding childbirth, birth participation, care during childbirth and care after childbirth. This article focuses on the attitude dimension, which was used to describe expectant father's basic attitudes towards childbirth. The attitude items were measured on a four-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree, 2 = somewhat agree, 3 = somewhat disagree, 4 = strongly disagree). The maximum score of this scale was 64 and minimum score was 16. The attitude of expectant fathers was assessed before birth, just immediately after admitted in the labor room and it was compared with the attitude after 30 min after birth by using the same scale.

RESULTS

Forty expectant fathers of low risk primigravida women were participated in the study. The mean age of all participants was 28.4 years (standard deviation = 3.68). Majority of participants (37.5%) were undergraduates. 42.5% of participants were professionals. Nearly 57.5% of participants were Christians.

Attitude Toward Childbirth

The study results revealed that childbirth was a painful experience and it may exhaust the mother during childbirth. These two items were statistically significant before and after birth participation ($P = 0.0349$, $P = 0.0155$). But majority

Table 1: Distribution of demographic characteristics of participants

Demographic variables	Number $n=40$	%
Age in years		
<25	08	20
26-30	18	45
31-35	07	17.5
>35	07	17.5
Educational status		
School education	12	30
Undergraduate	15	37.5
Post graduate	13	32.5
Occupation		
Coolie	11	27.5
Technical	12	30
Professional	17	42.5
Religion		
Hindu	14	35
Muslim	03	7.5
Christian	23	57.5
Type of family		
Joint family	12	30
Nuclear family	28	70

of expectant fathers reported that they were scared about childbirth, it was statistically not significant before and after childbirth participation ($P = 1.0000$). The expectant fathers were believed that childbirth was not an easy and pleasant experience and after birth participation. It also proved that childbirth is not easy and it was an unpleasant experience for the expectant fathers ($P = 0.0349$) [Table 1].

Attitude Toward Birth Participation

Majority of expectant fathers were reported that their presence may comfort the partner and the same attitude was there after birth participation also ($P = 0.0750$). Few expectant fathers reported that they were useless during childbirth, but after birth participation they realized that their presence is valuable in delivery suite ($P < 0.0001$). The participants agreed that the partner was the best choice for the mother during delivery ($P < 0.0001$). The emotional status of expectant fathers were not stable before and after birth participation ($P = 0.1468$).

Attitude of Care During Childbirth

The expectant fathers were reported that the mother should acquire the tender loving care provided by their partner during delivery ($P < 0.0001$) and the pain relief methods ($P < 0.0001$) were essential during delivery to have successful perinatal outcome. The study report also stated that the midwives care is not enough for the mother ($P = 0.2952$); they should be treated with kindness by the skilled staffs ($P < 0.0003$). All together the attitude during childbirth was revealed statistically significance before and after birth participation.

Attitude of Care After Childbirth

Majority of expectant fathers were showed interest to involve in taking care of their babies ($P = 0.0165$). They were accepted that only mothers care is not enough to the baby and the whole family should involve when taking care of the new born ($P = 0.0097$). The expectant fathers were reported that the mother should get additional care and support after delivery to lead a content family life ($P = 0.2128$).

DISCUSSIONS

Limited studies have been done to describe the attitude of expectant fathers towards childbirth. The fathers role in childbirth has changed dramatically since long ago the husband was being in hospital waiting room, anxiously awaiting a doctor's announcement: "It's a girl/boy." Today, most men are involved from the moment the pregnancy test comes back positive, attending prenatal appointments, childbirth classes and after the birth, father-baby groups [9].

In the changing social context of Indian scenario, the younger generation's attitudes towards family and their opportunities to interact with family and neighbors are also changing [10]. In other words, women need to have confidence in their partner ability to provide physical support during and following the

birth. So expectant father need to be encouraged to be involved in their wife's pregnancy, and should be properly prepared to provide the sole support for their wives during childbirth [11].

Culturally appropriate nursing interventions that helped women manage pain included non-pharmacologic techniques such as breathing, partner support, walking, the use of a rocking chair, and position changes. Tactile interventions included acupressure, massage, and hydrotherapy for patients with intact membranes. One woman described the importance of comfort measures that were done for her: "They distracted my attention from labor pain by massaging my sacral area and allowing me to grasp their hands. At that moment I felt a sense of security and felt less pain" [12].

Hodnett *et al.* [7], emphasized that the companion should provide physical support to help the woman tolerate the intensity of the contractions, so that she can feel good about her behavior during labor. Therefore, there should be an emphasis on the acquisition of skills, through birth preparation classes, for anyone, such as female friends and expectant father, hoping to support a woman in labor [Tables 2 and 3].

Although this study has demonstrated the expectant father's attitude towards childbirth was positive and it helps to improve their acquaintance better than their previous relationship. Childbirth is such a stress, can lead to emotional changes which need support from the care giver especially from their life partner [13]. Campero *et al.* [14], presented an anecdotal record of how birth companions help women to feel in control during labor. On the other hand, the same anecdotal record

Table 2: Percentage distribution of attitude of expectant fathers towards childbirth

Items	Before birth (n=40)		After birth (n=40)	
	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
Regarding childbirth				
Childbirth is more painful	80	20	85	15
Childbirth may exhaust the mother	75	25	90	10
I am scared about childbirth	80	20	82	18
Childbirth is easy and pleasant experience	85	15	90	10
Regarding birth participation				
My presence will comfort her	80	20	80	20
I will be useless during childbirth	75	25	85	15
I am the best person to be with the mother during childbirth	75	25	95	05
I worry that I may be emotional	80	20	85	15
Regarding care during childbirth				
My tender loving care is necessary	70	30	80	20
Need for pain relief methods	75	25	85	15
Midwives care is enough	70	30	80	20
Need to be treated with kindness by the skilled staffs	95	05	95	05
Care after childbirth				
I should involve in taking care of my baby	90	10	90	10
Mother's care is enough for the baby	85	15	90	10
I have to give additional support to my partner	80	20	85	15
Full family support is necessary	90	10	90	10

Table 3: Attitude of fathers towards childbirth

Items	Before birth participation Mean (SD)	After birth participation Mean (SD)	P value
Regarding childbirth			
Childbirth is more painful	3 (0.65)	3.47 (0.51)	0.0349*
Childbirth may exhaust the mother	3.15 (0.67)	3.63 (0.50)	0.0155*
I am scared about childbirth	3.55 (0.51)	3.53 (0.51)	1.0000**
Childbirth is easy and pleasant experience	3.05 (0.60)	3.53 (0.61)	0.0349*
Regarding birth participation			
My presence will comfort her	3.09 (0.81)	3.57 (0.49)	0.0750**
I will be useless during childbirth	2.8 (0.35)	3.2 (0.43)	<0.0001*
I am the best person to be with the mother during childbirth	2.95 (0.69)	3.68 (0.48)	<0.0001*
I worry that I may be emotional	3.1 (0.63)	2.9 (0.59)	0.1468**
Regarding care during childbirth			
My tender loving care is necessary	3.1 (0.47)	3.7 (0.72)	<0.0001*
Need for pain relief methods	2.8 (0.32)	3.4 (0.53)	<0.0001*
Midwives care is enough	2.9 (0.43)	3.1 (0.57)	0.2952**
Need to be treated with kindness by the skilled staffs	3.6 (0.5)	3.9 (0.08)	<0.0003*
Care after childbirth			
I should involve in taking care of my baby	3.2 (0.63)	3.5 (0.45)	0.0165*
Mother's care is enough for the baby	2.9 (0.52)	3.2 (0.49)	0.0097*
I have to give additional support to my partner	3.6 (0.8)	3.8 (0.73)	0.2128**
Full family support is necessary	3.8 (0.37)	3.9 (0.24)	0.0522**

*This difference is considered to be statistically significant. **This difference is considered to be statistically not significant. SD: Standard deviation

notes that for women who are alone, labor is a long and exhausting effort, full of uncertainties, and with no indication of how soon the baby will be born. The expectant fathers who were present during childbirth reported that their attendance resulted in a closer emotion bond with their partner and new born. In fact 71% either cried or felt like crying [15]. Although many women preferred to be left alone with their partner during the early stage of labor, they felt supported when they received continuity of care from a caregiver who inspired their confidence and trust. "They didn't leave my side, they were there the whole time-talking, helping me, they were brilliant, the balance was perfect for me. They treat you as if you're the only person there" [16].

Many couples would not like to stay together during childbirth. Women who need assistance and support of a close person, and an expectant father are the right person to have partner childbirth. Often husband know better than anyone else. What type of words may help their wives relax and endure pain, this helps women better recover, after childbirth have enough sleep and it gives men a chance to feel fathers [17]. Nurses who were perceived as the most caring and supportive seemed to demonstrate genuine concern and respect for the woman and her partner, go beyond the limit, and do more than expected for the patient and her family [18]. No matter what the birth

setting, the presence of a supportive companion or caregiver during childbirth can make it easier for women to deal with the stresses of labor. Qualitative research promotes greater depth and understanding of what women perceive as supportive during childbirth [19].

More specifically, this study evaluated the attitude of expectant fathers towards childbirth, the findings of the study indicated the expectant fathers were having positive attitude towards childbirth and they were qualified to give additional support to the mother during childbirth. We should also be cautious that their feelings and attitude during childbirth should not affect their further emotional well-being.

CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions were drawn on the basis of this study.

- The expectant fathers were having positive attitude towards childbirth overall. This positive attitude needs to be considered in prenatal counseling and the midwives should explain the different ways to support the mother during childbirth
- The study findings concluded that the Indian fathers are having positive attitude towards childbirth and they were well prepared to take care of their partner during childbirth.

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