

Negative birth experience – what matters most? Risk factors from three time periods during pregnancy: a register-based study

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May 30, 2021

Abstract

Objective: To explore the impact of risk factors from three different time periods on negative birth experience. **Design:** Register-based cohort study. **Setting:** Sweden. **Population:** Nulliparous women giving birth to singleton, term infants in 2013–2018 (n = 83 335), elective caesarean sections (CS) excluded. **Methods:** Hierarchical logistic regression was performed to calculate adjusted odds ratios (aOR) with 95% confidence intervals (CIs) in three blocks, each representing risk factors from one of three time periods: I) before pregnancy, II) pregnancy, III) labour. **Main Outcome Measurement:** Negative birth experience, defined as ratings of [?] 4 on a ten-point scale. **Results:** Poor self-rated health (SRH) was the only pre-gestational factor remaining associated with negative birth experience after adjustment for pregnancy- and labour-related factors (aOR 1.22, 95% CI 1.10–1.36). Fear of childbirth and treatment for psychiatric disorder during pregnancy were both associated with negative birth experience (aOR 1.53, 95% CI 1.36–1.73; aOR 1.51, 95% CI 1.35–1.68), as were all labour-related factors included in the model. Women giving birth by operative vaginal delivery or unplanned CS under regional anaesthesia had three-fold higher ORs for rating their overall birth experience as negative (aOR 3.23, 95% CI 2.99–3.50; aOR 3.04, 95% CI 2.77–3.33). The highest OR, 5.38, was seen among women undergoing unplanned CS under general anaesthesia (95% CI 4.52–6.40). **Conclusions:** The main contributing factors to a negative birth experience are labour-related. Poor SRH, psychiatric treatment and fear of childbirth places the woman in a vulnerable position requiring extra attention.

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