

FATHERS' BIRTH EXPERIENCE AND POSTNATAL MENTAL CONDITION

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Research in labour and delivery from the new fathers' point of view is still in its infancy, with studies being rare and heterogeneous.

Birth experience and postpartum mental condition were investigated in 174 fathers in the maternity ward of a University Hospital. Lacking a validated instrument for describing fathers' birth experience the German version of Salmon's Item List (SIL-Ger) which is validated for the birth experience of mothers was used as well as Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS) to reveal associations of birth experience and the fathers' postnatal mental health. One in ten men (11.4 %, N=19) reported a stressful or frightening birth experience, nearly one third (28.1 %, N=49) did not rate attending the delivery as a positive or rewarding emotional experience. Fathers being present at a spontaneous delivery - from a number of men in free answers phrased as "natural birth" - reached a higher score in the postnatal dimension of "fulfilment" than any other mode of delivery. In over half of the men (52.1 %, N=75) birth experience did not meet the expectations, with childbirth education classes, number of previous children or previous attended births being of no significant impact. Unfulfilled expectations towards birth are a known risk factor for negative birth experience in women. We showed unfulfilled expectations to be associated with difficulties in coping, discomfort and anxiousness and a less rewarding birth experience in fathers. SIL-Ger could be shown to be an easy-to-use and reliable tool to assess birth experience in men.