

Postpartum Women's Perceptions on the Quality of Intrapartum Care during Vaginal Births: An Exploratory Descriptive Qualitative Study

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Childbirth is a major milestone in a woman's life, and its memory lasts forever. How a woman experiences childbirth care influences not only the woman's own health but also the well-being of the newborn as well as the family. Therefore, this study aimed to explore postpartum women's perceptions of the quality of care they received during labour and childbirth. An exploratory descriptive qualitative study was conducted at the postnatal wards in Teaching Hospital Peradeniya, Sri Lanka. Individual, in-depth interviews were conducted among fifteen purposively selected postpartum women. The interviews were tape-recorded, and the data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis method. Data analysis identified three major themes and nine sub-themes: 1) women's current childbirth experiences (positive childbirth experiences, negative childbirth experiences); 2) perceived quality of childbirth care (human resources, physical resources, appropriate birth environment, women's expectations vs. reality); and 3) perceived needs for quality childbirth care (effective communication and timely information, respect and preservation of dignity, labour companionship). Many participants perceived the quality of current childbirth care to be good, as there was adequate and competent staff, adequate equipment, and an appropriate birth environment. Most of the women's current childbirth experience was on or above their expectations. On the contrary, some women perceived that the care would be improved by adequate and proper supervision, effective communication, providing timely information, allowing labour companionship, showing respect, and preserving women's dignity. Women's negative childbirth experiences have affected the quality of care during labour and childbirth. However, the good outcomes of the childbirth process have allowed women to overlook those negative experiences. The findings of this study might be helpful in clinical approaches and designing future studies about the prevention of negative birth experiences and improving the quality of intrapartum care to ensure that all women experience a positive labour and birth.

Keywords: Childbirth experience, Intrapartum care, Perceptions, Quality of care, Vaginal births

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