

Paternal Experience with Participation in Labor and Birth

Experiência Paterna com a Participação no Parto e Nascimento
Experiencia Paterna con la Participación en el Parto y el Nacimiento

RESUMO

Objetivo: analisar a experiência paterna com a participação no parto e nascimento. **Método:** estudo descritivo e exploratório com abordagem qualitativa. A população foi composta por 10 pais que acompanharam o trabalho de parto e o nascimento do filho em uma maternidade pública de referência da capital do Ceará. Os dados foram coletados por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas e analisados por meio da técnica do Discurso do Sujeito Coletivo e pelo *software Iramuteq*®. **Resultados:** o que mais motivou a participação paterna no processo de parturição foi a expectativa de participar do nascimento do filho e fornecer apoio/suporte a sua companheira. O principal sentimento vivenciado foi de felicidade, além disso percebeu-se que os entrevistados classificaram essa experiência como algo bom e inesquecível, sentindo-se importante em todo o processo. **Conclusão:** é fundamental estimular e favorecer a participação do companheiro da gestante durante o ciclo gravídico, parturitivo, puerperal e nos cuidados com o recém-nascido.

DESCRIPTORES: Paternidade; Pai; Trabalho de parto; Parto; Nascimento.

ABSTRACT

Objective: To analyze the paternal experience of participating in labor and birth. **Method:** A descriptive and exploratory study with a qualitative approach. The sample consisted of 10 fathers who witnessed the labor and birth of their child at a leading public maternity hospital in the capital of Ceará. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using the Collective Subject Discourse technique and Iramuteq® software. **Results:** The main motivation for paternal participation in the birth process was the expectation of participating in the birth of their child and providing support to their partner. The main feeling experienced was happiness, and the interviewees classified this experience as positive and unforgettable, feeling important throughout the process. **Conclusion:** It is essential to encourage and promote the participation of the pregnant woman's partner during pregnancy, labor, and postpartum periods, as well as in newborn care.

DESCRIPTORS: Fatherhood; Father; Labor; Childbirth; Birth

RESUMEN

Objetivo: Analizar la experiencia paterna de participar en el parto y nacimiento. **Método:** Estudio descriptivo y exploratorio con enfoque cualitativo. La muestra estuvo compuesta por 10 padres que presenciaron el parto y nacimiento de su hijo en una maternidad pública líder en la capital de Ceará. Los datos se recolectaron mediante entrevistas semiestruturadas y se analizaron utilizando la técnica del Discurso del Sujeto Colectivo y el software Iramuteq®. **Resultados:** La principal motivación para la participación paterna en el proceso de parto fue la expectativa de participar en el nacimiento de su hijo y brindar apoyo a su pareja. El principal sentimiento experimentado fue la felicidad, y los entrevistados clasificaron esta experiencia como positiva e inolvidable, sintiéndose importantes durante todo el proceso. **Conclusión:** Es esencial incentivar y promover la participación de la pareja de la gestante durante el embarazo, el parto y el posparto, así como en el cuidado del recién nacido.

DESCRIPTORES: Paternidad; Padre; Trabajo de parto; Parto; Nacimiento.

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INTRODUCTION

Pregnancy is a period marked by major biopsychological changes and the moment when preparation for parenthood begins. It is an important event in a couple's life, bringing a range of intense feelings that have not been experienced before and can strengthen the bond between the mother, father, and child⁽¹⁻³⁾.

The main guidelines regarding the birthing process recommend the presence of a companion of the woman's choice throughout the labor and delivery process. In Brazil, this right is guaranteed by Law 11.108, and providing this is considered a humane and dignified practice for women⁽⁴⁾.

Despite being the law and offering numerous benefits, the presence of a companion during childbirth still faces challenges to effectively happen. This limitation may occur due to inappropriate physical structures or because some health professionals restrict access to them. However, studies have shown that the presence of a well-prepared companion promotes greater comfort and emotional support for the pregnant woman, as they understand the labor process and provide assistance in the decisions to be made^(3,5).

Having a companion is essential for women, as they are in a vulnerable moment, and the physical or emotional support offered by the companion provides security and comfort. In addition, it is a

safe and effective practice that upholds women's reproductive rights⁽⁵⁾.

Throughout history, fatherhood has followed a path opposite to that of motherhood. Although cultural changes in society's behavior are currently being observed, mothers are often still seen as the ones who care for, nurture, and nourish their children. Meanwhile, fathers occupy the role of provider, oblivious to other situations related to their children. This leads to a devaluation of men's participation in the childbirth process⁽⁶⁾.

Given this context, it is necessary for men to develop a paternal identity that goes beyond being the provider, understanding that the role of father brings benefits to them and their family, as it strengthens the bonds between the three⁽⁶⁾.

The presence of the father as a companion can be considered ideal due to the bond that exists between both parties. Furthermore, by being there, he affirms his paternity, thus valuing his role as a father⁽⁷⁾. Paternal involvement should be encouraged from the prenatal stage, since this is when the main questions about labor are clarified. Therefore, health professionals should prepare not only the mother-to-be but also her companion⁽³⁾.

Understanding the relationship between the father and the birth is fundamental for decision-making involving this family context. It is the moment when the bonds that have been formed since preg-

nancy are strengthened and can be further reinforced during labor and birth. Given this context, the study aims to analyze the paternal experience with participation in labor and birth.

METHOD

Type of study

This is a descriptive and exploratory study with a qualitative approach. Its report was structured according to the criteria of the *Consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative research* (COREQ).

Location and period

The research was conducted in a referral maternity hospital in the city of Fortaleza, in the state of Ceará. It is linked to the Unified Health System (SUS), responsible for medium and high complexity care, in hospital and outpatient care for women and newborns.

The maternity hospital allows the presence of a companion freely chosen by the woman, who is present from pre-delivery to post-delivery. Data collection took place in the joint accommodation, approximately 24 hours after the delivery process.

Data collection took place in October 2023, in the shared accommodation of the aforementioned institution, intentionally, not probabilistically, for convenience.

Participants

A total of 10 fathers who participated in the birth of their children were invited to respond to a semi-structured interview with questions about their experience in the birthing process.

The following inclusion criteria were considered: being over 18 years of age, having been the birth partner of choice to experience the birth process, having participated in labor, delivery, and birth with their partner, and being the biological or non-biological father of the newborn. The exclusion criteria were: communication difficulties or physical or mental health conditions that made it impossible to report their experiences.

Data collection

The interviews were recorded with the aid of a tape recorder, and continued until data saturation was reached. The collected data were managed using Epi Info software version 7.1.5. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, USA). This program generates a database, which, after typing is complete, allows for a review of the data in order to find possible errors and correct them so that an analysis can be performed later.

Data analysis

For analysis, the Collective Subject Discourse (CSD) technique developed by Fernando Lefevre and Ana Maria Lefevre⁽⁸⁾ was used, characterized by a proposal for the organization and tabulation of verbal data. The technique consists of analyzing the material collected from each interview, where the discourses are written in the first person singular and tend to express the thoughts of a collective, as if this collective were the speaker of a discourse⁽⁸⁻⁹⁾.

Next, the *Iramuteq* version 0.7 alpha 2 (*Interface de R pour les Analyses Multidimensionnelles de Textes et de Questionnaires*)⁽¹⁰⁾ software was used, which allows different processing and statistical analysis of the texts produced. In this research, word clouds were used. With this, words are grouped and organized graphically according to their frequency, which allows

for easy identification from a single file, called a corpus, thus bringing together all the texts from the interview. In this way, each interview characterized a text, and the set of these texts constituted the corpus for analysis.

Ethical aspects

The study was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee of the Municipal Health Secretariat of Fortaleza, obtaining approval under CAAE 71623823.6.0000.0203, opinion 6.310.589, following the recommendations of Resolution No. 466/2012 of the National Health Council on research involving human beings⁽¹¹⁾.

RESULTS

The sample consisted of ten fathers, aged between 18 and 39 years, seven (70%) of whom self-identified as brown. Regarding education, high school graduates accounted for the highest number of responses, eight (80%). Regarding the parents' origin, the city of Fortaleza stood out, with five (50%), however, there were also participants from cities in the metropolitan region.

When asked about their current work

situation, the majority reported being active, six (60%). Most of the income was around 1 minimum wage, seven (70%).

After the sociodemographic characterization of the sample, qualitative interviews were conducted using the Collective Subject Discourse technique⁽⁸⁾ and analysis with the *Iramuteq* software, where fathers who participated in the birth of their children were able to report their feelings and perceptions about that moment.

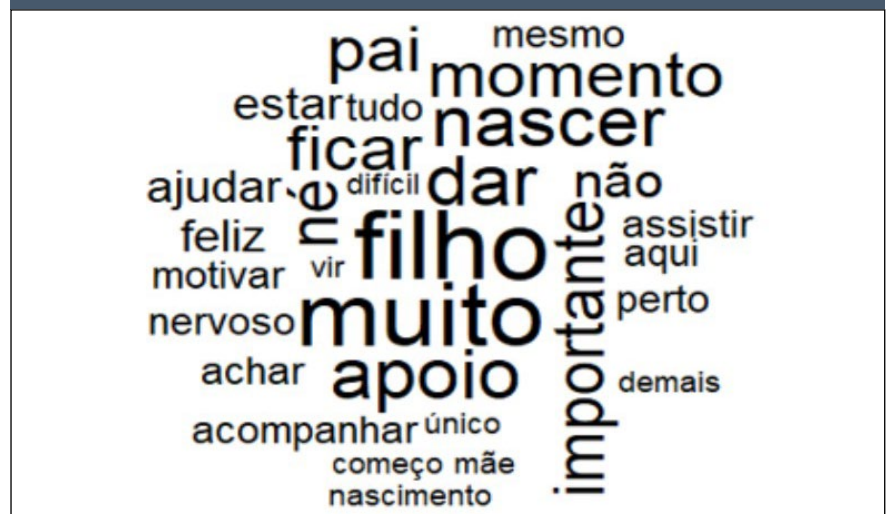
Initially, the question asked was: What motivated you to accompany your partner during labor and the birth of your child? The following DSC was obtained:

The motivation was to see my son being born, right? I think it's important for every father to see his child being born, to be present and helping, right? That's what really motivated me, to see my son being born... he's here, and experiencing all of this motivated me. I'm very happy that I stayed and accompanied everything closely. It's a unique moment in a father's life, to watch the birth of a child up close. DSC 1

Figure 1 complements DSC 1 with a word cloud referring to the first question.

It shows the words that were most frequently repeated in the interviewees' speeches.

Figure 1: Word cloud on the motivation to accompany childbirth. Fortaleza, CE, Brazil, 2023.



Source: Organized based on Iramuteq® software.

It can be seen in the figure that the words are positioned randomly, with the most frequent words appearing larger than the others, thus demonstrating their prominence in the research analysis corpus.

Using the word cloud method, which groups words and organizes them graphically according to their frequency, the word “child” was the most frequent in the corpus—16 times.

In addition, the words “birth,” “support,” and “moment” were also prominent:

The father's support is very important...we are a family. Not to mention that for her (wife) it is also important to have us giving support, right, helping our child to be born. It's a very important moment for our family...all the support I gave her was good because it made her calmer. DSC 2

Support for the woman in labor can strengthen the couple's relationship. During labor, the men realized how much they loved their partners, valuing every moment they experienced together. These feelings were evident in the words of one of the interviewees:

My wife is everything to me, I love her so much, being here with her during her suffering was very good... being able to stay close to her... it just made me see that she is very strong, she endured all the pain, I am proud of her... she is my life. DSC 3

The following question was also asked: tell me about your experience in the process of labor and birth. How did you feel? What was your role? How important was your participation?

For me, it was the best experience of my life. It's my first child, so you can imagine how emotional it was. I felt very emotional, I even cried, I was very happy, even though I was nervous. I thought I was going to faint because I was so nervous. There's a lot of blood, right? But it was the best experience of

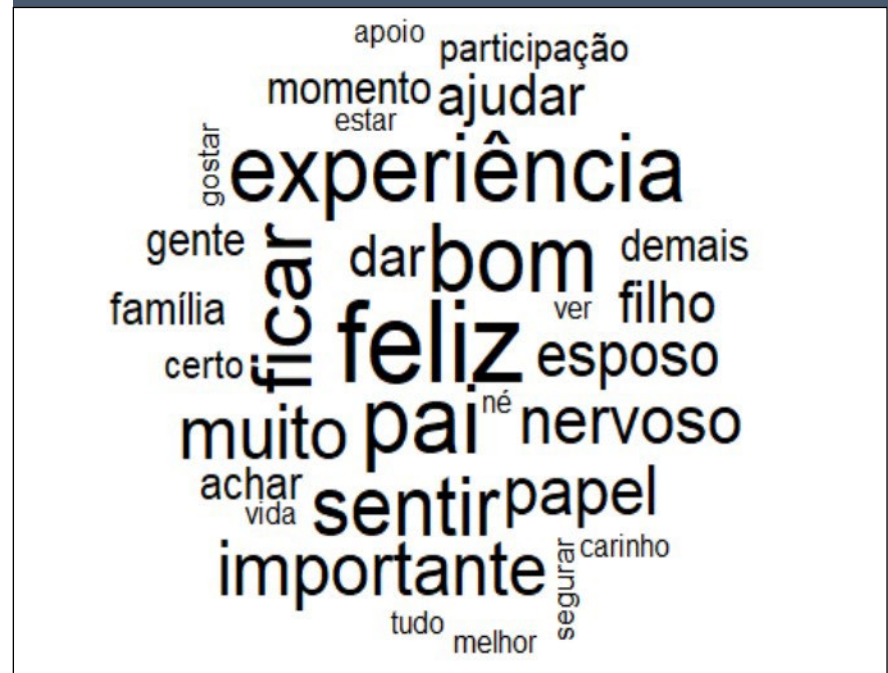
my life, I was really happy. The experience was good. It was the first time I had seen a birth. I was nervous, but it was good. I held my son in my arms, scared to death. I felt happy. DSC 4

The interviewees had some difficulty expressing in words what they were feeling and how it was for them to go through this experience. Their

statements clearly revealed their emotion and nervousness, especially among those who were accompanying the birth of their first child.

Below is a word cloud of the second question in the questionnaire. It can be seen that the word happy was the most frequent in the corpus – 17 times (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Word cloud about the experience of the father's participation in childbirth. Fortaleza, CE, Brazil, 2023.



Source: Organized based on *Iramuteq* software.

The word “happy” stood out, followed by the words “experience,” “father,” “feeling important,” and “good,” showing that the main feeling experienced by the interviewees when participating in the birth of their children is related to happiness. In addition, it is clear that the interviewees classified this experience as something good, fulfilling their role as fathers and feeling important throughout the entire birthing process.

The fathers had high expectations, curiosity, and fears related to their role during labor, but they also showed interest in participating and getting

involved in the process. Some studies show that fathers who accompany the birth of their children experience feelings such as joy and fear, in addition to developing feelings of anxiety because they are unable to help the woman in moments of pain.

I was nervous from the early hours of the morning when she started feeling the pains. I was afraid that something bad would happen. I didn't know how to help, I didn't know what to do. I felt sorry for my wife for feeling so much pain. If I could, I would feel it in her place, but in the end, everything turned out fine. DSC 5

The parents described childbirth

as a time when expectations and fears arise. They realize that accompanying this moment can be difficult for them, as there is a feeling of helplessness in the face of a certain situation.

I was very happy, but very nervous and didn't know what to do. We are left with our hands tied. I can only offer support, I can't do anything else. I wanted to help more. There was too much blood, and I was worried too, afraid of what might happen, but then the nurse explained to me that everything was normal. DSC 6

DISCUSSION

The presence of a companion, from prenatal care to labor, delivery, and postpartum, provides many benefits to women, contributing to the reduction of pain, fears, and insecurities. In addition, it can reduce the duration of labor, the chances of developing postpartum depression, and the rates of cesarean sections⁽¹²⁻¹⁴⁾.

None of the interviewees in the sample had ever accompanied pregnant women in a hospital setting, nor had they ever accompanied a labor. Lack of preparation for this moment can be a barrier to a positive and safe experience.

Accompanying a woman during the birthing process gives a man the opportunity to experience the birth of his child, and he should be able to perceive his participation not only as a companion, but as a protagonist alongside his partner. Therefore, regardless of his perception of this role, it is hoped that this moment will bring him an important and meaningful experience in his life⁽¹⁵⁾.

Fathers seek to participate in childbirth because they believe that experiencing the arrival of their child can create and/or strengthen the bond between father and child. The father's experience at the time of delivery and birth of his child encourages him to participate more actively in the care of

the newborn⁽¹⁶⁾.

That said, according to the participants' statements, their motivation for accompanying the birth of their children was to experience this unique moment, in addition to providing support to their partners. It is known that the process of childbirth is a moment marked by diverse feelings, which stimulate the creation of bonds between family members. However, when fathers have limited knowledge about the birthing process and little guidance about what is happening, they tend to visualize a terrifying scene.

A study conducted in southeastern Brazil showed that fathers were concerned about childbirth even during pregnancy. To reduce anxiety at this time, fathers tend to seek information about prematurity, types of delivery, and possible complications. This information comes from conversations with health professionals, as well as from seeking clarification in the media and/or on the internet. Seeking accurate information is a way to experience the birth of their children in a safer and more peaceful manner⁽¹⁷⁾.

The father should be included in the birth in order to act as a support for the pregnant woman, helping her throughout labor and delivery. For this, it is necessary for the father to receive guidance so that he can understand his role and experience it in a positive way, with more comfort and confidence, providing support for his partner⁽¹⁸⁾.

In the *corpus* of the word cloud, the terms "help," "participation," and "support" appeared more discreetly, showing that even though fathers know their place and role in childbirth, these feelings and attitudes are still under-explored and under-emphasized.

Nursing professionals end up following the entire birthing process and all the actors involved more closely, who often experience feelings of fear,

distress, and anxiety due to a lack of knowledge, and this can make the moment of the child's birth a difficult situation for the father, with the nurse being responsible for guiding and reassuring the woman and her companion whenever necessary⁽¹⁵⁾.

When well guided by the team, the father becomes a more active and involved companion in the process, offering support not only with words of encouragement, but also with non-pharmacological methods of pain relief (massage, bath, conscious breathing, walking) that bring physical comfort to the woman.

The active presence of the father as a companion strengthens the bond with the triad and promotes the feeling of fatherhood. This is the moment when the transition from man to father occurs, giving rise to or reaffirming paternal feelings. Thus, it is necessary to have a trained team to provide support and guidance to the father, encourage his participation in caring for the baby, and strengthen his role as a protagonist, resulting in a positive birthing process for those involved.

The father, as a protagonist in the birthing process, alongside his partner, understanding his role and experiencing the evolution of labor up close, providing support and being present and active, favors a more positive outcome of the birthing process and the birth of the baby, which can reduce possible complications and negative events, making the birth a positive experience for both parties. Thus, the study reinforces the value for the father of being able to participate in the birth of his child. This experience is fundamental for the formation of the father-child bond.

The main limitation of the study was the difficulty in finding updated bibliographic material focused on paternal participation during labor, delivery, and birth, reinforcing the importance of new studies that can address the topic and promote the inclu-

sion of fathers in the birthing process.

CONCLUSION

For the fathers interviewed, the experience was positive and motivated by the desire to see their child being born, in addition to being present to provide support to their partners.

The main feeling experienced by the fathers interviewed was happiness, with this experience being classified as a good and unforgettable moment, exercising their role as fathers and recognizing their importance throughout the childbirth process.

It is important to emphasize the need to encourage and strengthen the

participation of partners from the prenatal consultations onwards, as this is when preparation and guidance about the pregnancy and postpartum cycle begin, with information provided about the childbirth experience and the presence of a companion of the woman's choice during the process.

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