

EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF FIRST-TIME MOTHERS

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ABSTRACT

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The aim of this qualitative study was to explore the expectations and experiences first-time mothers have before, during, and after pregnancy. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with fifteen first-time mothers, who gave birth within eighteen months before the date of the interview, and an additional interview was included with a first-time pregnant woman in her third trimester (N=16). The method of analysis was based on grounded theory, including line-by-line coding, focused coding and memo writing. Several themes emerged in the process. Approximately 70 percent of the women in this study became pregnant unintentionally. All of them described a certain amount of anxiety and fear about giving birth and becoming a mother. The measures taken in regard to activities and nutrition to improve pregnancy outcome were described. The most disconcerting findings were how the birth went for many of the women and the subject of postpartum emotional difficulties. Another theme was the different factors that negatively influenced the experience of giving birth. All of the women wanted to give birth vaginally and without medication, but seven of the women had to have medical interventions during birth - were administered Pitocin, mechanically induced, or had C-sections - which influenced their postpartum mental and emotional state severely. The disappointment after complications and diversions from a birth plan were significant. Fifty percent of the participating

women reported to have suffered from postpartum emotional disorders, and three of them did not seek any help. Feelings of failure and low self-value due to emotional difficulties were described several times and also appeared in relation with body image issues. Physical changes, during and after pregnancy, were another major theme among the women. Transitions in their relationships were also mentioned in the interviews. Concluding, self-stigmatization was a main thread throughout the interviews. These findings are analyzed in relation to existing literature and the implications for future research are being discussed.

Carol Brooks Gardner, Ph. D., Chair

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