Women´s perception about the companion: A descriptive and exploratory study with a qualitative approach.

ABSTRACT
Objective: to describe women’s perception for the presence of a companion during labor. Method: it is descriptive and exploratory study with a qualitative approach. For the data production, there were semi-structured interviews with 20 recent mothers after 12 hours of normal labor, during the study period from September-November 2011. The research place was a rooming in a public maternity hospital in Natal/RN, in the Northeast of Brazil. The information was recorded, transcribed and subjected to content analysis technique. The Research Ethics Committee CAAE No 0153.0.051.000-11 approved the project research. Results: the analysis process created three thematic categories with sub-categories: 1. Feelings by the presence of a companion during labor 2. Companion’s participation during labor and 3. Considerations about the ideal companion. Conclusion: the mothers experienced feelings of comfort and well-being by the presence and support of a person next to them and the determination of the ideal companion is not amenable to generalization. Descriptors: Obstetric Nursing; Humanized Birth; Labor.

RESUMO

La percepción de las mujeres sobre el acompañante durante el trabajo de parto

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

WOMEN´S PERCEPTION ABOUT THE COMPANION DURING LABOR

LA PERCEPCIÓN DE LAS MUJERES SOBRE EL ACOMPAÑANTE DURANTE EL TRABAJO DE PARTO

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RESUMEN
Objetivo: describir la percepción de mujeres sobre la presencia del acompañante durante el trabajo de parto. Método: estudio descriptivo e exploratorio, con enfoque cualitativo. Para la producción de los datos, fueron utilizadas entrevistas semiestrucuturadas con 20 recién paridas después de 12 horas de un parto normal, durante el período de septiembre a noviembre de 2011, que tuvieron un acompañante durante el trabajo de parto. El lugar de la investigación fue un cuarto en una maternidad pública de Natal/RN, en la Región Nordeste de Brasil. Las informaciones fueron grabadas, transcritas y sometidas a la Técnica de Análisis de Contenido. El proyecto de investigación fue aprobado por el Comité de Ética en Investigación, CAAE no 0153.0.051.000-11. Resultados: el proceso de análisis originó tres categorías temáticas con respectivas subcategorías: 1. Sentimientos generados por la presencia del acompañante durante el trabajo de parto; 2. Participación del acompañante durante el trabajo de parto y 3. Consideraciones sobre el acompañante ideal. Conclusión: las madres vivieron sentimientos de conforto y bienestar por la presencia y apoyo de una persona a su lado y que la determinación del acompañante ideal no es pasible de generalización. Descriptores: Enfermería Obstétrica; Parto Humanizado; Trabajo del Parto.

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INTRODUCTION

During the twentieth century, with institutionalization of the labor care, women stopped giving birth at home and started to practice it in the hospital. The instituted practices based on norms and routines made passive women without the presence of people around them, offering them measures of physical and emotional comfort during labor and delivery.¹

The humanized delivery care emphasized that for the well-being of the woman, the companion of her choice should have free access to childbirth and postpartum, and the health care team should provide him emotional support.² The Program for Humanization of Prenatal and Birth (PHPB) established in 2000, provides that health facilities should receive the woman, family and newborn with dignity.³

During labor, fear, pain and anxiety increase because of a mechanized clinical environment and the unknown professionals, generating negative effects for the successful evolution of this process.⁴

In Brazil, there is the recognition of the right by the law n° 11.108 of April 07 2005 of the pregnant women having a companion of her choice during labor, determining that the services of the Unified Health System (SUS) allow the presence during all the period of labor, delivery and immediate postpartum.⁵ Despite the existence of this law, the companion with the woman in labor in the SUS is reduced.⁶

This study may help to stimulate measures to ensure the permanence of the companion in obstetric units, very important in humanizing and care to the recent mother as an efficient measure to reduce the rates of maternal and neonatal morbidity and mortality. Thus, it aims to describe the perception of women for the presence of a companion during labor.

METHOD

Article elaborated from the research report "Overview of postpartum women in the companion’s supporting during labor. »

Descriptive and exploratory study with a qualitative approach, developed in the nursing rooming (NR) of the Januário Cicco Maternity School (JCMS) of the Federal University of Rio Grande (UFRN), Natal, RN, Brazil.

The analyzed population was all women of the NR of the JCMS who meet the following inclusion criteria: postpartum women, after 12 hours of normal birth, who had a companion during labor and who were willing to talk about their experiences. Women subjected to ceasarean section and those aged up to 19 years old were not in the study. The sample consisted of 20 women and we used the criteria of saturation of the data collected when the statements became repetitive.

With these the inclusion criteria, we informed women about the purpose of the study and invited them to participate in the study after signing the informed consent, according to Resolution 196/96 of the National Health Council.⁷ The interviews were from September to November 2011, in the NR of the institution, using a tape recorder with the mother’s permission.

Data collection was through a semi-structured interview with the following question: “How was for you to have a companion during your labor?”. After recording the statements, we transcribed and analyzed them using the content analysis technique.⁸

To preserve the identity of the mothers, we identified them by the letter “I” followed by a number. Regarding ethical aspects, Ethics in Research of UFRN approved the study receiving Opinion No. 404/2011, of Protocol n0127/11-P CAAE 0153.0.051.000-11.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the thematic analysis of the data, the messages meaning units were classified from the central topic: “Perception of the mothers on the presence of a companion during labor”, elaborating three thematic categories with their respective subcategories: Theme Category 1: Feelings by the presence of a companion during labor and Subcategories: Feeling of support; Feelings of well-being. Theme Category 2: Participation of the companion during Labor and Subcategories: emotional support; Physical support; watcher role. Theme Category 3: Considerations on the ideal companion.

Theme Category 1: Feelings by the presence of a companion during labor

In the subcategory Feeling of support, the feelings revealed were: safety, protection, support and companionship, evidenced in the following reports:

For me, it is very important because the person feels more secure, more comfortable, right? Because if something happens, there is someone around to hold in your hand, say something, ask for strength. (Interviewee 01)

It’s good because they give more security because you are so shaken, so shocked,
because in the maternity you see a lot of things. So it's a little hard, then they give us more security. (Interviewee 11)

We can observe, from the obtained statements, the meaning for the mothers attributed to their trusted companions of their social network, not letting her alone and playing a role supporting her and encouraging her to lead with the labor process.

These findings correspond are because the companion represents the psychic and emotional support of the comforting presence of physical contact to share the fear and anxiety, sharing forces positively stimulating the mother during difficult times. 9

A study showed that women with a companion during labor become quiet, safe and this presence helps in reducing the time of this process and the number of cesarean sections, 10 revealing that the support offered by the companion affects the good outcome parturition, contributing to a more positive experience of this moment.

Being together with a woman during childbirth is to allow their natural skills for maximize this process. It is necessary to create an enabling context, physical environment and adjusted relations, given that women feel empowered to experience all that intensity moment. 11 From a physiological point of view, the companion stimulates hormone production to women decreasing their alertness and anxiety towards the unknown, bringing more serenity, confidence and consequently a more positive response assistance. 11

As for feelings related to subcategory Feelings of Welfare, we found feelings of confidence, excitement, comfort and feeling of being at ease. These last two were in the report of the 01 interviewed, as explained previously. Other statements show the following:

It was very good. We become more confident having someone close to the family. (Interviewee 02)

It was exciting because I did not have this with the other, now I had. It was good. (Interviewee 05)

The feelings of wellbeing and excitement generated by the presence and support of a companion, as mentioned in these reports, create conditions for a full experience of positive feelings related to labor and birth, enabling an enjoyable experience and by involving emotions.

A study that searched the importance of the companion during the process of labor from the perspective of postpartum women found that women reported an incorporation of positive feelings on receiving this kind of support, such as: security, courage, tranquility and comfort, with a consequent reduction of anxiety, loneliness and fear of the unknown environment, meaning that women had a positive perception of the participation of this person during labor. 12

This positive emotional support provided during labor leads to higher psychological outcomes, both in the immediate post-partum as the mediate in the group with companion, expressing a lesser maternal anxiety, increased self-esteem, satisfaction with motherhood, more positive perceptions of the baby, success in breastfeeding, lower rates of health problems and feeding the newborn, significant reduction in maternal depression and better relationship with the partner. 13

Contrarily to the positive feelings mentioned before, a finding that clashes with all these feelings refers to one report in which the women mentioned feeling of embarrassment during her labor with her companion, as revealed the following statement:

I think the presence of a companion is a little embarrassing, right? But it was alright. It's, like, because I had never had a companion in my other three kids, so that is why I thought differently. (Interviewee 06)

This speech shows the situation in which female modesty prevents the mother to be at ease in labor with the presence of the companion, since the inhibition may be in this situation involving physical exposure of women. From this perspective, it is noteworthy that, for these women, modesty regarding sexuality and reproduction seem to prevail, especially in the “traditional” patterns of previous generations. 13

This reflects how cultural constructs influence the definitions and points of view regarding the presence of the companion during labor and delivery. In this sense, professionals must respect the free choice of the pregnant women if they prefer a companion or not.

- Theme Category 2 - Participation of a companion during labor

In this category, we found that the support provided by the companion has emotional and physical aspects, identifying the following subcategories relating to the participation of the companion: Emotional support, Watcher role and Physical support.

Regarding Emotional support, this support is with the touch, company, eye contact, providing positive words, encouragement, support and lullaby.
The companion stood there holding my hand, giving strength, saying it would be okay, that it was already over. These things. (Interviewee 01)

She tried to calm me down, because it was my first child and then you get excited, right? And feeling pain, then how the person is there calming you down, giving you a word of support is good. (Interviewee 08)

These statements reflect the active provision of emotional support from the companion. In interviewees' reports, there were situations in which the participation of the companion was not visible, but even so, these mothers felt well only with this presence.

Thus, she was far. She was close to me and I just stared. But it was nice to have her around. (Interviewee 12)

She did not help me. She just gave me confidence, she stood there by my side, right? I felt safer with her near me. (Interviewee 09)

In all these statements, as identified in a research conducted in a public hospital in Ribeirão Preto/SP, the support of a companion during labor is mainly related to the presence and share this moment marked by words of encouragement, exchanges of affection between parturient and her companion. Thus, the support offered is limited, in particular, the emotional support and satisfaction of the parturient with the companion is not related to the observable quality of care, but that presence represent. 14

Regarding the role of watcher companion, is questioning about the welfare of women. This was observed in a study in which members of the professional care team delivery indicated that the continuous presence of the companion with the laboring mother and the active participation that enabled rapid detection of difficulties and meet the demands for care promptly and detail, providing security, both the mothers and the professionals. 15

Regarding physical support, the mothers reported that it was through massage, use of Bobath ball, music, stimulation of breathing exercises, providing assistance to ambulate, shower and liquid feeding.

This issue was in a survey of postpartum women, that about 92% (226) of the surveyed said the companion helped during contractions, but despite this high rate, 70% said that such assistance would certainly be better if the companion had received orientation and/or training. 3

♦ Theme Category 3 - Considerations about the Ideal Companion

When asked about the ideal companion to stay with the woman during labor, they most mentioned the child's father with 45%, followed by the mother's postpartum in 20%. Currently, there is more frequently in the presence of men in spaces previously exclusive to women. This occurs because of changes occurring in contemporary society, expanding expectations regarding the important role of fathers in the pregnancy cycle puerperal woman. 16

In this study, the preference for the presence of the father in the scene of labor was because is the person who gives confidence and trust, and to observe what women experience during labor and delivery and share the moment the childbirth.

Having a companion reflects the ideals of father and mother experiencing pregnancy together. Moreover, the presence of the companion makes women feel valued, since they would witness the anxiety experienced by them. 12,15 In addition, providing the partner the right to participate, to experience this process with his companion and son, stimulating early father-child bonding, which proves more prepared and willing to share the baby care, becoming active and present. 17

A study in a Maternity of Fortaleza/CE identified that the present companions were the majority (80%) females, the most frequent category of mother’s companions. 12 The inhibition with the partner, causes some women to prefer another woman, while others seek to negotiate with their companions in the position that they stay in the environment, seeking to preserve their look or ensure some control over their area of vision during this event. 11

Regarding the justifications of preference for the mother, she has already experienced similar situations, providing greater support and security. This finding was also identified in a research, in which the mother's choice by most participants revealed that this had previous experience of normal deliveries, helping to provide the support and expertise of their experience. 18

Other mothers mentioned that the ideal companion is the person who meets the following qualities: a person close to the woman, confident, intimate, tolerant, passing security and available to help. 12 Such qualities necessary for a companion will meet the capacity of the transmission support, which is strong enough to experience the birthing process, keeping with the companion relationship of intimacy and trust. 12-15
The companion is the imaginary part of the woman, when she thinks the time of delivery, as security in the companion to have someone close and trusted as well as the team of professionals, which assigns the task of care in the management of labor."}

**CONCLUSION**

Postpartum women had positive perceptions about the support provided by the companion involving physical, emotional and watcher role, reflecting in comfort and well-being for women, providing experience and more positive attitude for labor.

According to the ideal companion, the interviewees pointed people in their social area who have security bond and trust, corresponding in the study to the father of the child, followed by the mother of the postpartum woman. Thus, before the benefits related to intrapartum support, institutions of delivery care should stimulate the interaction between laboring woman and her companion, making the most humane and consistent help with the legal requirements under the rules of the Ministry of Health.

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