

A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF EXPECTANT FATHERS IN MANGALORE

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Abstract :

The study was conducted to explore the unique experiences of expectant fathers. The research approach used in this study was Phenomenology. Six expectant fathers who met the inclusion criteria were selected using purposive sampling technique from the OPD unit of the Fr. Muller Medical College Hospital, Mangalore and a private antenatal clinic, Saurabh clinic in Mangalore. In depth interviews were conducted in a selected room in the antenatal clinic with all privacy. Colaizzi's data analysis framework was used to analyze the transcripts in this study. From the analysis of the data, five themes emerged from the experiences of expectant fathers and they were as follows: Theme 1: Happiness and satisfaction - the response to pregnancy, Theme 2: Relationship with wife- Physically and emotionally, Theme 3: A change in social life, Theme 4: Coping with Pregnancy, Theme 5: Expectations about the baby

Keywords: Phenomenology, lived experiences, expectant fathers

Introduction :

Becoming a father and preparing for fatherhood are major events for any individual, with men experiencing mixed emotions about the pregnancy and future role as fathers. It can be the happiest moment for a man to hear that his wife is pregnant, but at the same time may be a stressful event, because he has to prepare for his new role as a father.


There was a time when the father's role in a pregnancy was limited to driving his screaming partner to the hospital and pacing nervously around the waiting room. Those days seem to have disappeared forever. Being heavily involved during the nine months of pregnancy is probably the best way to not only assist their spouse through the traumas of it all, but also to feel a sense of participation for him. Helping with the birth is a relatively new phenomenon for

most men but is now accepted as common practice in most countries. Going to the antenatal classes can help them to understand how to support their wife during pregnancy and childbirth.

The father's active participation in the birth process has done a lot to dissipate the old and deeply ingrained notions that the baby's upbringing belongs exclusively in the mother's domain, although there is still much work to do in this matter. Despite the importance of father-child relationships, the transition to fatherhood remains understudied.

A study conducted by ManSoo Yu from University of Missouri has found that stress related to pregnancy uniquely affects the health of expectant fathers, which in turn, influences the health of expectant mothers and their infants. Mental distress in pregnant women -- caused by anxiety, lack of social support or low self-esteem -- is associated with poor infant health. Men play an important role in supporting and caring for pregnant women. Providing prenatal care for expectant fathers can encourage men to have a proactive role in pregnancy, which will allow for better maternal and infant health outcomes.

Midwives are facing great difficulty in providing family-centered care in pregnancy as half of the family units, namely the partners of the mothers-to-be, remain marginalized because their needs and aspirations are

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empirically undiscovered. This study explored the unique experiences of 'to be fathers' and narrating its meaning, so that effective family-centered nursing care can be provided for pregnant women.

Methods:

The research approach used in this study was Phenomenology. Six expectant fathers who met the inclusion criteria were selected using purposive sampling technique from the OPD unit of the Fr. Muller Medical College Hospital, Mangalore and a private antenatal clinic, Saurabh clinic in Mangalore.

The researcher contacted the participants once they agreed to participate, before the interview to prepare them for the actual meeting and to answer any preliminary questions. At the time of the first interview the researcher obtained informed consent and permission to tape record the conversation. The interview was conducted during their next visit in the antenatal clinic. In depth interviews were conducted in a selected room in the antenatal clinic with all privacy. The interviews were started with open ended clarifying questions like "could you share with me your responses when you heard that your wife is pregnant". Each tape recorded interviews lasted approximately 10 to 20 minutes. The language of communication was Malayalam and English. Colaizzi's data analysis framework was used to analyze the transcripts in this study.

Results:

The analysis is presented under the two headings:
 (i) Demographic Characteristics of the Participants and
 (ii) Analysis of the verbatim of Participants

Demographic Characteristics of the participants

- Majority (50%) of the expectant fathers were in the age group 31 to 35 years.
- 4 out of 6 expectant fathers, had completed their graduation and above.
- In this study 2 expectant fathers were Hindus and 2 Muslims and 2 Christians by religion.
- Majority of the participants had (4 out of 6) a monthly income of above Rs. 11000

- Out of 6 expectant fathers five were from nuclear family.
- Regarding the occupation majority (50%) of the participants were business men.
- The duration of married life of 5 out of 6 expectant fathers was more than 2 years.
- The gestational age of the spouses of majority (4 out of 6) of expectant fathers was between 6-9 months.

Analysis of the verbatim of Participants

Theme 1: Happiness and satisfaction- the response to pregnancy

All the participants expressed their feelings of happiness and excitement at the moment they came to know that they are going to be a father. They expressed their happiness by sharing the good news with their parents, relatives and friends. "Yes, the first time... I realized that she was pregnant, it was... it was... it was... really exciting, I mean... it was like... something like we were thinking of... then I realize we were really happy..." (Participant 6)

One participant who was on treatment for infertility felt that this child was an answer to his prayer. "Our prayers are fulfilled... after lots of prayer we got the baby..." (Participant 2)

After marriage when they could not have a child within a year or two, one participant expressed the feeling of inadequacy. This pregnancy is viewed by him as a reply to all who have been asking him about the child. The participant expressed a sense of satisfaction. "Now if anyone asks about a child... I could answer... I'm satisfied... that happiness is also there..." (Participant 4)

Theme 2: Relationship with wife- physically and emotionally

All the participants felt that this pregnancy and their baby increased the love and affection between them. The participants also felt more attachment to his wife after she became pregnant. "I feel she's loving me much more... may be because... I could give her a child..." (Participant 4)

All the participants expressed the felt need for giving extra

care and support to the wife and thereby to the child. Some participants expressed their care by going for outing when they were free, being with their wife, and buying foods which she likes. Most of the participants offered their support by helping in household activities. "Some extra care... may be a little more... than before...just being with her for some more time and... and talking with her a little more...Now I do a little more work at home and... try to share the responsibilities in jobs at home." (Participant 6)

All the participants told that they are adjusting with the physical changes in their wife. After the pregnancy they are adjusting in the sexual life also. "Now we don't have sexual relation... she's very tired... and I don't want to disturb her now." (Participant 4)

Theme 3: A change in social life

Two participants told that there are some changes in their daily routines. The change they noticed mainly is increased number of leave from duty for reasons like antenatal checkups. "Then... in between I've to take leave to go for checkup and all... I used to go along with her, although... jobwise it is not good for me..." (Participant 4)

All the participants identified the need for supporting their wife during pregnancy. The men wanted to protect and support their wives by sharing the responsibilities at home. "We stay alone and I help her in house hold work... I used to do it but... now I do a little more work at home and try to share the responsibilities in job at home." (Participant 6)

Two participants felt that now they are more concerned about the family and now he wants to spend more time with his wife and family. "I go out with friends... but I tried to come back home early... and...I tried to be with her for more time, comes home early...in evening." (Participant 6)

Theme 4: Coping with Pregnancy

All the participants expressed about the financial aspects of pregnancy. Most of the participants are anticipating some financial problems at the time of delivery. The participants viewed themselves as the financial support. "Too much expense is there now... for scan and

all... but I do my maximum." (Participant 1)

Most of the participants are disturbed either physically or emotionally once their wife got conceived. The tension is mainly about financial matters, health of the mother and the baby and about the outcome of the pregnancy. One participant expressed a feeling of sadness while seeing his wife's difficulties. At times the expectant fathers were very irritated and tensed. The participants also expressed sleep deprivation because of the difficulties of the wife. "My wife has so much difficulty now... I'm feeling very sad...while... seeing her difficulties now I can't sleep properly, I get irritated easily now..." (Participant 1)

Theme 5: Expectations about the baby

Two participants expressed their preference for particular sex of the baby. One participant preferred boy child while three preferred a girl child. Even though they have gender preference they are ready to accept a boy or girl child without any hesitation. But they expressed their wish to have a healthy child. "Whether it's a boy or girl... I'm happy..." (Participant 1), "My baby should be fine and... should be healthy..." (Participant 4)

Most of the participants have not yet started the preparations for receiving the baby while two participants told that they have started the preparations for the arrival of the new one. The preparations mainly include searching for names, baby materials, toys, cradle etc. "I've selected one name – Fathima... if it's a girl... if it's a boy I'll call him, Sinan... I didn't prepare anything at home for the baby..." (Participant 2), "I've bought one cradle for the baby, and then... some toys also..." (Participant 4)

All the participants are eagerly waiting for the arrival of their child. They are looking forward with excitement to the day when they become a father. "We're waiting for that day... (Smiling). I'm really waiting eagerly to see my baby..." (Participant 4)

Discussion :

The first theme was "Happiness and satisfaction - the response to pregnancy". A study conducted among Taiwanese expectant fathers also revealed similar findings

where 'Jubilation' was one of the themes emerged⁴. The expectant fathers also should be encouraged to express their feelings of joy and satisfaction.

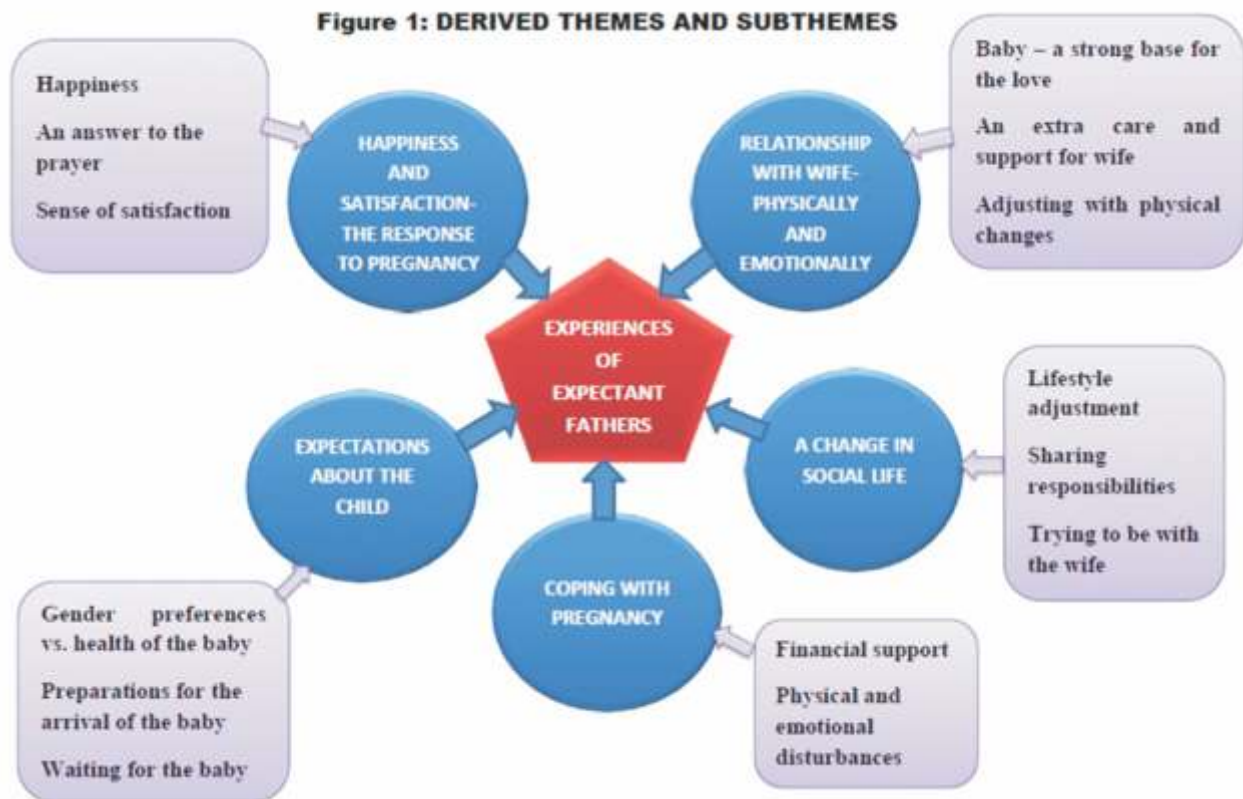
A study was conducted to describe the different ways of being a father identified in a sample of 71 Finnish men. They viewed their main role as supporter of spouse which is consistent with the study finding, an extra care and support for wife³⁷. This was consistent with the theme Relationship with wife- Physically and emotionally where the participants expressed the felt need for giving extra care and support to the wife and thereby to the child.

The third theme emerged during the analysis was "A change in social life". The expectant fathers are experiencing changes in their social life and daily routines during the pregnancy. A research was conducted to develop a substantive grounded theory from the experiences of the men during this transitional period in their lives. One of the theoretical constructs emerged from the data collected was coping with the changing roles and lifestyle¹⁸

Expectant fathers have lot of expectations about their unborn child in terms of gender, health etc. Majority (50%) of the participants preferred female child. A descriptive phenomenological study explored the life experiences of 14 Taiwanese first-time expectant fathers. The findings revealed that one of the key themes emerged among the first-time expectant fathers was gender concerns⁴. Although gender preferences were there, the participants in this study are more concerned about the health of the baby.

Conclusion :

Midwifery focus on family centered care and it can be delivered only through the support of the partners of expectant mothers. As Bruce Linton says, "The birth of a child opens the doorway to discovering the nurturing qualities within us as men. These discoveries not only benefit our children, our partners, and ourselves, but create a new potential for the society we live in." This research threw light on the unique experiences of the first time expectant fathers. The findings showed that there is a need to reaffirm the place of caring in nursing and midwifery if



our goal is to provide a high quality service which meets the needs of the woman and her family. It is essential for nurses to advance family-centered care so as to involve the partners of the expectant mothers in pregnancy.

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