

Men's Attendance in Labour and Birth Room: A Choice and Coercion in Childbirth

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Abstract : In the last century, the role of fathers in the birth has changed exponentially. Before the 1970s, the principal view was that birth was a female business and not a man's place. Changing cultural and professional attitudes around the emotional bond between a man and a woman, family structure and the more proactive involved role of men in the family have encouraged fathers' attendance at birth. There is evidence that fathers' support can make birthing less traumatic for some women and can make couples closer. This has made some clinicians to believe the fathers should be more involved throughout the birth process. Some clinicians even go further and ask the fathers to watch the medical procedures, such as inserting vaginal speculum, forceps or vacuum, episiotomy and stitches. Although birth can unfold like a beautiful picture captured by birth photographers, with fathers massaging women's backs by candle light and the miraculous moment of birth, it can be overshadowed by less attractive images of cervical mucous, emptying bowels and the invasive medical procedures. What happens in the birth room and the fathers' reaction to the graphic experience of birthing can be unpredictable. Despite the fact that most men are absolutely thrilled to be in the delivery room, for some men, a very intimate body part can become completely desexualised, and they can experience psychological and sexual scarring. They see someone they cherish dramatically sliced open and can then associate their partners with a disturbing scene, and it can dramatically affect their relationships. While most women want the expectant fathers by their side for this life-changing event, not all of them may be happy for their partners to watch the perineum to be cut or stitched or when large blades of forceps are inserted inside the vagina. Anecdotal reports have shown that consent is not sought from the labouring women as to whether they want their partners to watch these procedures. The majority of research^{1, 2, 3} focuses on men's and women's retrospective attitudes towards their birth experience. However, the effect of witnessing invasive procedures during childbirth on a man's attraction to his partner, while she is most vulnerable, and also an increased risk of post-traumatic stress disorder in fathers have not been widely investigated. There is a lack of sufficient research investigating whether women need to be asked for their consent before inviting their partners to closely watch medical procedures during childbirth. Future research is required to provide a basis for better awareness and involve the consumers to understanding the men's and women's experience and their expectations for labour and birth.

Keywords : birth, childbirth, father, labour, men, women

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