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FATHERS´ BIRTH EXPERIENCE AND POSTNATAL MENTAL CONDITION

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Research in labour and delivery from the new fathers´ point of view is still in its infancy, with studies being rare and heterogeneous.
Birth experience and postpartum mental condition were investigated in 174 fathers in the maternity ward of a University Hospital. Lacking a validated instrument for describing fathers´ birth experience the German version of Salmon´s Item List (SIL-Ger) which is validated for the birth experience of mothers was used as well as Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS) to reveal associations of birth experience and the fathers´ postnatal mental health. One in ten men (11.4 %, N=19) reported a stressful or frightening birth experience, nearly one third (28.1 %, N=49) did not rate attending the delivery as a positive or rewarding emotional experience. Fathers being present at a spontaneous delivery - from a number of men in free answers phrased as "natural birth" - reached a higher score in the postnatal dimension of "fulfilment" than any other mode of delivery. In over half of the men (52.1 %, N=75) birth experience did not meet the expectations, with childbirth education classes, number of previous children or previous attended births being of no significant impact. Unfulfilled expectations towards birth are a known risk factor for negative birth experience in women. We showed unfulfilled expectations to be associated with difficulties in coping, discomfort and anxiousness and a less rewarding birth experience in fathers. SIL-Ger could be shown to be an easy-to-use and reliable tool to assess birth experience in men.

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