

Attitude of pregnant women in south western Nigeria towards caesarean section as a method of birth

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ABSTRACT

Background: Choice of the method of birth is an essential decision for pregnant women and the spouse. This choice is sometimes based on a number of factors. This study assesses knowledge of pregnant women about caesarean section, their attitude towards it and level of acceptance of the methods of birth among women.

Methods: This descriptive study was carried out in a government owned hospital in south western Nigeria. Respondents were selected using accidental sampling techniques. Questionnaire whose validity and reliability has been previously ascertained was the instrument used for data collection. Data generated was analysed using SPSS.

Results: Results show that 17.1% of the women have good knowledge of caesarean section as a method of birth. Majority of the respondents agreed that vaginal delivery creates more mother-baby relationship than caesarean section. 69.5% of the respondents agreed that caesarean section is preferable to vaginal delivery as the pain in vaginal delivery is usually unpleasant, 66.0% disagreed that babies born through caesarean section are more healthy than their other counterpart that are born through vaginal delivery. Only 6.9% accept caesarean section.

Conclusions: Mothers should therefore be educated on the process involved in caesarean birth and the advantage of this method of birth over other birth method.

Keywords: Attitude, Acceptance, Caesarean section, Knowledge, Methods of birth

INTRODUCTION

For a healthy women population, the choice of delivery option is an important decision. Expectant parents make many choices which usually include site for delivery (hospital, birth centre, or home), and the choice between spontaneous vaginal delivery and caesarean section.¹ Over time caesarean section rates has been on the increase in the whole world.² Both developed and developing nations of the world have their own share of this increase.³

Epidemiological studies in Brazil and Chile have shown that there is higher caesarean section rate among women who have a higher level of education.⁴ In some African, increase in the rate of caesarean section have been documented; Ghana⁵ and Nigeria.⁶ However there is a broadly held belief that West African women have an aversion for caesarean section delivery.⁷ Maternal knowledge and occupation has also been seen to influence the attitude of women towards mode of delivery. Many studies have proven women preference for vaginal deliveries over surgical delivery.⁸⁻¹⁵ Although majority of caesarean sections are emergency caesarean

sections especially in developing nations there is also a noticeable increase in the rate of elective surgery of late probably due to increase level of knowledge of women, improvement in medical practice and women higher level of education. It is important to note that elective emergency caesarean section is known to be associated with more maternal and newborn morbidity than planned vaginal birth.¹⁶⁻¹⁹ In a study carried out by Nira and colleagues to assess the attitude of women toward caesarean section in Nepal they found out that vaginal delivery was the preferred mode of delivery by 93% of the respondents while 7% preferred caesarean section as mode of delivery.³ Their reasons for these ranges from it been a natural process, been good for mother's health, safety to been an easy process.

Most of the women thought that caesarean delivery can cause long term ill effect on mother's health. All the women who preferred elective caesarean delivery initially said that they would rather opt for painless labour and vaginal delivery if offered over caesarean section. Similarly Aziken, Omo-Aghoja, & Okonofua submitted that inaccurate cultural perception about caesarean section delivery account for poor attitude of women towards caesarean section.²⁰ Aali & Motamedi reported that only one third of women demonstrate positive attitude towards caesarean delivery as against 95.5% for vaginal delivery in the same group of respondents. The study concluded no significant differences in attitude and knowledge scores according to women's levels of education.²¹

It is not strange to hear many pregnant women ventilating wrong attitude towards caesarean section as an alternative method of birth. Especially in the developing countries like Nigeria, a number of women believe caesarean section is a last resort used to deliver a pregnant women of her baby, many will even say, been told that they are going to deliver their babies through caesarean section is like giving a death warrant. This attitude towards caesarean section influence women acceptance of the procedure and resulted in psychological depression that women and their family usually experience when been told that their baby will be delivered through caesarean section, this will have adverse effect on the outcome of the procedure.

Research objectives

This study seeks to:

1. Assess the level of knowledge of women about caesarean section.
2. Determine the attitude of women towards caesarean section.
3. Assess the level of acceptance of caesarean section as a method of birth among women.

METHODS

This study adopted descriptive design to assess the attitude of women towards caesarean section as an alternative method of birth. The study will be conducted at state specialist hospital, Akure Ondo State. This is a government owned hospital that provides secondary level of health care to the people. Respondents were selected using accidental sampling techniques; only pregnant women that were met in the clinic during their ante natal clinic were recruited to participate in the study. Participation was optional. Thumb's rule was used to determine sampling size. i.e. at least 30% of the hospital monthly ante natal clinic attendance. The average monthly ante natal attendance in the hospital is 410.

Questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. The questionnaire was developed from literature review; it is a self-administered structured likert-type questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into three (3) sections. Section A asked questions about socio demographic characteristics of the respondents, section B asked question about the knowledge of the respondents about caesarean section while section C seek to assess respondents attitude towards caesarean section as an alternative method of delivery. The validity of the questionnaire was established through face and content validity criteria. The developed questionnaire was given to experts in the field of nursing, reproductive health, sociology and demography and social statistics for thorough scrutiny. Each item on the instrument was examined for content clarity, scope and relevance to the study.

The reliability of the instrument was established by test-retest method. The instrument was administered on twenty pregnant women attending ante natal clinic in mother and child hospital Akure, Ondo state twice with 3 weeks interval. The result was correlated using Spearman rho correlations with correlation coefficient of 0.81. This result shows that the instrument is highly reliable. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the authority of state specialist hospital Akure. Only pregnant women that consented to participate in the study were recruited. Participation was made voluntary and the right of any participant to withdraw from the study at any stage without any adverse consequences on the care they receive in the clinic was stressed to them. Data collected were stored in a pass worded folder in the personal computer of one of the respondents. Every information provided was used only for the study.

Data generated were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Service Solution (SPSS), version 16. Correct answer on the knowledge question of the questionnaire attract 2 marks, incorrect answer attract 1 mark. Total cumulative score of 70% and above is regarded as good knowledge, 50% to 69% fair knowledge while a score of 49% and below is regarded as poor knowledge of caesarean birth.

RESULTS

Results show that the mean age of the women that participated in the study was 31.64 years with standard deviation of 6.13 and range of 29.00. Level of education of the women shows that 38.9% had tertiary education, 28.6% secondary education, 30.5% primary education while only 4 respondents (2.0%) did not have any formal education. More Christian and Yoruba participated in the study as compared to other tribe or religious group. Sixty six (32.5%) were single while 67.5% were married.

Obstetric history of the respondents shows that vast majority (75.9%) had their last baby through normal vaginal delivery, 5.9% through caesarean section and 3.4% through assisted vaginal delivery. If respondents were to choose method of birth, 85.7% will choose vaginal delivery, 8.9% caesarean section while 5.4% said they did not have preference for any method, 42.9% will agree if given the option of caesarean section for their next delivery, 45.3 will disagree while 11.8% were undecided about what their response will be. The mean number of pregnancy that the respondents had carried shows 2.69, while number of children shows mean of 2.30.

Respondent perceived factors that promote the rate of caesarean section shows that 80.3% agreed to advancing age, 60.1% agreed to socioeconomic factors, 22.2% disagree while 17.7% were undecided. About half of the respondents (45.8%) agreed that reduced parity can be factors 30.0% were undecided while 24.1% disagreed. Results also showed that 69.5% opined that improvement in surgical techniques was responsible for increase in the rate of caesarean section, 23.2 were undecided while 7.4 disagreed.

The Table 1 presents the level of knowledge of the women toward caesarean section as a method of birth. Result from the table shows that only 17.2% of the respondents have good knowledge of caesarean section, 36.0% have fair knowledge, while majority, (46.8%) have poor knowledge of caesarean section.

Table 1: Knowledge of women about caesarean section.

Knowledge	Frequency	Percentage
Poor knowledge	95	46.8
Fair knowledge	73	36.0
Good knowledge	35	17.2
Total	203	100.0

Results from this study also show that 60.1% of the respondents believed that pain in caesarean section is less severe as compared to pain in vaginal delivery. Most of the respondents (40.9%) believed that maternal morbidity is not more associated with caesarean section than vaginal delivery, 34.5% believed that maternal morbidity is more frequent in caesarean section than vaginal delivery. Result also shows that many of the respondents (43.3%) opined that infections are more common among women delivered with caesarean section than vaginal delivery. Majority of the respondents (77.8%) opined that method of birth does not dictate the level of intelligent of the baby while 12.8% said baby born through caesarean section are more intelligent than their other counterpart through vaginal delivery. the table also revealed that many of the women (58.6%) believe that bleeding in caesarean section is less severe than normal vaginal delivery.

Table 2: Respondents attitude towards caesarean section.

	Agreed	Undecided	Disagree
Vaginal delivery creates a more affectionate mother-baby relationship	126 (62.1)	22 (10.8)	55 (27.1)
Caesarean section is preferable in the absence of economic problems	84 (41.4)	48 (23.6)	71 (35.0)
Caesarean section is preferable as pain of vaginal delivery is unpleasant	141 (69.5)	12 (5.9)	50 (24.6)
Babies born by caesarean section are healthier that those delivered by vaginal delivery	26 (12.8)	43 (21.2)	134 (66.0)
Having a birth plan (written outline of preferences for labour and birth) is a good idea for a pregnant women.	145 (71.4)	21 (10.3)	37 (18.2)
It is a woman's right to choose a caesarean section for herself, even if there are no medical reasons to have it	130 (64.0)	25 (12.3)	48 (23.6)
Compared with vaginal birth, caesarean section prevents bladder problems (such as urinary frequency, urgency or loss of urine) in the future.	120 (59.1)	39 (19.2)	44 (21.7)
Compared with vaginal birth, caesarean section prevents future sexual problems for the mother.	101 (49.8)	25 (12.3)	77 (37.9)
Compared with vaginal birth, caesarean section is more convenient for mothers.	88 (43.3)	43 (21.2)	72 (35.5)
Caesarean section is a less painful method of delivery than vaginal birth.	170 (83.7)	7 (3.4)	26 (12.8)
Compared with vaginal birth, caesarean section is safer for the baby.	116 (57.1)	41 (20.2)	46 (22.7)
For women, Caesarean section is as safe as vaginal birth.	142 (70.0)	8 (3.9)	53 (26.1)

Table 2 present the attitude of women towards caesarean section, majority of the respondents (62.1%) agreed that vaginal delivery creates more mother-baby relationship than caesarean section. 69.5% of the respondents agreed that caesarean section is preferable to vaginal delivery as the pain in vaginal delivery is usually unpleasant. Findings from the study also show that many of the women (66.0%) disagreed that babies born through caesarean section are more healthy than their other counterpart that are born through vaginal delivery while 12.8% agreed to that assertion. Many of the women (64.0%) opined that women have the right to choose caesarean section even if there are no any medical reasons for that. Three out of every five women said caesarean section prevents bladder problem in the future, 49.8% agreed that caesarean section prevents future sexual problems for the mother. Vast majority (83.7%) said caesarean section is less painful for the mother when compared to vaginal delivery. on how convenient caesarean section is; 43.3% said it is more convenient, 21.1% were undecided while 35.5% disagreed. Seventy

percent of the women believe caesarean section is safer for the women and 57.1% agreed that it is safer for the baby as a method of birth.

Results from the study as shown in Table 3 shows, that 93.1% of the respondents agreed that vaginal delivery is a natural and acceptable mode of delivery. Larger percentage of the respondent (92.6%) agreed that seeing once baby immediately after delivery as it is the usual practice in vaginal delivery that is absent in caesarean section delivery is pleasurable to the mother, a good number of the mothers (79.3%) also agreed that mothers regain their health status faster after vaginal delivery than caesarean section. about the outcome 65.5% of the mother believe that vaginal delivery has more pleasant outcome than caesarean section, while 17.2% disagreed with this assertion. overwhelming majority of the mothers (80.3%) opined that having vaginal delivery gives the woman confidence in her ability to give birth, while 59.1% of the women said any woman who deliver through caesarean section miss an important life experience.

Table 3: Respondent’s perception of caesarean section.

	Agreed	Undecided	Disagree
Vaginal delivery is a natural and acceptable mode of delivery	189 (93.1)	10 (4.9)	4 (2.0)
Seeing the baby immediately after vaginal delivery is a pleasure for the mother	188 (92.6)	9 (4.4)	6 (3.0)
Mothers regains her health status sooner after vaginal delivery than caesarean section	161 (79.3)	14 (6.9)	28 (13.8)
In terms of outcome, vaginal delivery is more pleasant	133 (65.5)	35 (17.2)	35 (17.2)
I believe that having a vaginal birth is a more empowering experience than delivering by caesarean section	143 (70.4)	20 (9.9)	40 (19.7)
The most important thing in having a vaginal delivery is the woman’s own confidence in her ability to give birth	163 (80.3)	10 (4.9)	30 (14.8)
Women who deliver their baby by caesarean section miss an important life experience	120 (59.1)	26 (12.8)	57 (28.1)
I believe that a woman recovers faster after a caesarean section than after vaginal birth.	51 (25.1)	19 (9.4)	133 (65.5)

DISCUSSION

Findings of this study show that mean of the mothers attending ante natal clinic in state specialist hospital Akure was 31.64 years with standard deviation of 6.13. Study also found out that out two of every five woman attending ante natal clinic in the hospital had tertiary level of education while only four respondents did not have any formal education. This study also further established Yoruba and Christian’s dominance of Akure where this study was carried out. It is important to note that one out of every three pregnant women that participated in this study were single i.e. they got pregnant out of wedlock, this will have tremendous

implications on their family structure and the society in the future as this establish the increase in single parenthood in our society.

Overwhelming majority of the respondents had their last baby through normal vaginal delivery, which established women preference for normal vaginal delivery over caesarean section. This is in support of submissions of previous studies.⁸⁻¹⁵ They all reported that despite increase in the rate of caesarean section among women in their various study population, majority of the women still prefer normal vaginal delivery over caesarean section method during birth.

Mothers' perceived factors that promote the increased rate of caesarean section include: advancing maternal age, socio-economic factors, reduced parity and improvement in surgical technique, this is consistent with assertions of Cunningham who opined that reasons suggested by mothers for the increase rates of caesarean delivery include advancing maternal age, socioeconomic factors, reduced parity and improvements in surgical techniques.²² Women knowledge of caesarean section shows that only few of the respondents have good knowledge of caesarean section, this is not strange in that many of them did not like the method.

Many of the respondents' perceived reduced pain as one of the advantages of caesarean section; but they reported that caesarean section is associated with increased maternal morbidity and rate of infections. Most of the women believed that caesarean section does not affect the level of intelligence of the baby, it is however important to note that 12.8% of the respondents opined that babies born through caesarean section are more intelligent than their counterparts through vaginal delivery. Scientific discovery however, have not documented any relationship between caesarean section and level of intelligence of the baby; except that when instrumental deliveries were done when vaginal delivery is not properly managed it can lead to brain damage in the baby which can affect the level of the child's intelligence in the future.

Attitude of the mothers towards methods of birth shows that majority believed that vaginal delivery create more mother-baby friendly relationship than caesarean section; good number will prefer caesarean section because of the reduction in the level of pain as compared to vaginal delivery. Mothers perceived that babies born through caesarean section are healthier and that they have the right to choose caesarean section over normal vaginal delivery even if it is not medically indicated. A good number of the respondents perceived that caesarean section prevent various problems for the women in the future, these according to them include bladder related problems and sexual problems. On the convenience of CS method of birth, two out of every five women believed that it is more convenient than vaginal delivery; 21.1% were undecided while the rest disagreed.

Almost all the respondents said vaginal delivery is natural and acceptable mode of delivery; and that seeing once baby immediately after delivery as it is the usual practice in vaginal delivery that is absent in caesarean section and delivery is pleasurable to the mother. They also viewed that mother regain their health status i.e. the go back to their pre pregnancy state of health faster and better in vaginal delivery as compared to caesarean section, therefore agreed that the outcome of vaginal delivery is more pleasant than caesarean section. It is therefore not strange that majority of the mothers submit that vaginal delivery gave the woman confidence in her ability to give birth and that a woman that does not have the opportunity

of given birth through vaginal delivery misses as important life experience.

Implication of the study

This study shows that a good number of the women attending ante natal clinic in state specialist hospital Akure still have negative attitude towards caesarean section and their knowledge about this important method of delivery is still poor. It is therefore, not strange that a good number of the respondent did not like caesarean section as a method of birth. This study now implies that despite increase rate of caesarean section the acceptance is still low, it is therefore likely that majority of the mothers that undergo caesarean section do that because it is mandatory.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. All women of reproductive age should be educated on caesarean section as a method of birth.
2. Teaching on caesarean section should be included in the Ante Natal health education.
3. Government should encourage caesarean section delivery by subsidizing the cost to encourage women to opt for this method of birth.
4. Right of women in choosing any preferred method of birth at any level of health care should always be respected.

Suggestions for further study

While this study established that many women still prefer normal vaginal delivery over caesarean section; this might however not be generalisable as it is only women that have undergone the two methods of delivery and did not opt for caesarean because it is the only available option but voluntarily choose to deliver through caesarean section that can objectively assess the two method of birth. Therefore, further study should be done among women that had had previous experience of the two methods of birth. This study was conducted among mothers attending ante natal clinic in one hospital, further study should be done in multiple hospital or even multi-state study so that the result will be generalisable and better comparison can be made across religion and ethnicity.

CONCLUSION

This study found out that although the rate of caesarean section is on the high side the acceptance is still low possibly due to poor knowledge of the process and negative attitude towards it, it is therefore inferred that majority of women that undergo caesarean section do not

like this method of birth, they probably opt for it because it is the only available option. Mothers should therefore be educated on the process involved in caesarean birth and the advantage of this method of birth over other birth method.

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