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Humanized Childbirth: An Experience Report of the Assistance Offered by the Unified Health System in a City in the SouthEast of Brazil

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ABSTRACT

Background: Childbirth is a crucial event in a woman's life and her baby's, with significant implications for the health and well-being of both. In Brazil, the predominant approach has been medicalized childbirth, with frequent medical interventions during the birthing process. However, growing evidence highlights the benefits of humanized childbirth for the physical and emotional health of the mother and baby. In this context, this study analyzes the transition towards more humanized childbirth practices in Brazil, its impacts, and associated challenges.

Objectives: This study aims to analyze the implementation of humanized childbirth practices in Brazil, focusing on the stages of pregnant women reception, preparing the environment for the child's arrival, and the symbolism of childbirth through Placenta Printing. Specific objectives include evaluating pregnant women's satisfaction with the childbirth experience, analyzing the reduction of unnecessary medical interventions, and assessing neonatal outcomes associated with these practices.

Methods: The study is an experience report that occurred in a municipal hospital in Minas Gerais, Brazil, during the year 2024. Humanized childbirths were followed through the Brazilian public healthcare system, which offers free and universal assistance to pregnant women during childbirth. The stages of pregnant women reception, preparing the environment for the child's arrival, and the symbolism of childbirth through Placenta Printing were detailed and implemented according to established protocols. Pregnant women's satisfaction was assessed through postpartum interviews, while data related to the rate of medical interventions and neonatal outcomes were collected and analyzed.

Results: The results demonstrated high satisfaction among pregnant women with the humanized childbirth experience, highlighting empathetic reception, clear and respectful communication, and consideration of their preferences in preparing the environment and practicing Placenta Printing. Additionally, there was a significant reduction in unnecessary medical interventions, reflected in a decrease in the cesarean section rate, episiotomies, and other medical procedures during childbirth. Neonatal outcomes were also positive, with favorable neonatal adaptation indicators.

Conclusion: The experience of humanized childbirth in Brazil represents a significant advancement in promoting maternal and neonatal health. Despite the challenges faced, the benefits associated with this comprehensive approach to childbirth are undeniable. It is crucial for health authorities, healthcare professionals, and society to continue supporting and promoting humanized childbirth practices as part of a broader effort to improve maternal and neonatal health outcomes in Brazil.

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Introduction

The childbirth is a crucial moment in a woman's life and her baby's, with significant implications for the health and well-being of both. In Brazil, the traditional approach of medicalized childbirth has been prevalent for decades, with frequent medical interventions during the birthing process [1].

However, growing evidence has highlighted the benefits of humanized childbirth, both for the physical and emotional health of the mother and baby. This article analyzes the transition towards more humanized childbirth practices in the Brazilian context, its impacts, and associated challenges [2,3].

The concept of humanized childbirth is broad, multifaceted, and can be explored in various dimensions and complementary ways

[4,5]. The adoption of humanized childbirth practices is associated with a series of benefits for maternal and neonatal health. These include a reduction in unnecessary medical interventions, a decrease in cesarean section rates and obstetric complications, as well as an improvement in maternal satisfaction with the childbirth experience [6]. Additionally, humanized childbirth has been associated with a reduction in neonatal morbidity [7].

Despite the recognized benefits, the implementation of humanized childbirth practices in Brazil faces a series of challenges. These include cultural and institutional resistance to change, lack of adequate training for healthcare professionals, and inadequate infrastructure in some healthcare institutions. Additionally, issues related to the financing and remuneration of humanized childbirth services also represent significant obstacles [8].

Material and Methods

The study is an experience report that took place in the southeast of Brazil, in the state of Minas Gerais, in 2024, following humanized childbirths at the Municipal Hospital of Timóteo through the Brazilian public healthcare system, which offers free and universal assistance to pregnant women during childbirth. The hospital provides humanized childbirths, allowing for better reception of the patient at such an important moment. Thus, the experience was divided into three stages.

Reception of the Pregnant Woman

In the initial stage, the multidisciplinary team warmly welcomes the family, prioritizing the establishment of an empathetic and trusting connection. The goal is to create an environment where the pregnant woman and her companions feel safe and comfortable. Some key aspects of this stage include

- **Empathetic Approach:** Healthcare professionals receive the family with empathy, recognizing their emotional needs and providing a supportive environment from the first contact.
- **Clear and Respectful Communication:** The team provides clear information about the childbirth process, carefully listening to the concerns and expectations of the pregnant woman and her family. Respectful communication is essential to promote the autonomy and involvement of the woman in childbirth-related decisions.
- **Initial Assessment of the Pregnant Woman:** During reception, an initial assessment of the pregnant woman is conducted to check her overall health status, stage of labor (if applicable), and any specific needs that require immediate attention.

Preparation of the Environment for the Child's Arrival

This stage focuses on preparing the physical environment for childbirth, ensuring that it is suitable and conducive to providing a positive and safe experience for the mother and baby. Some important aspects of this stage include

- **Comfortable and Individualized Environment:** Each delivery room is individually prepared according to the preferences of the pregnant woman and her family. This may include adjustments in lighting, temperature, and room decoration to create a welcoming and relaxing atmosphere.
- **Positive Sensory Stimulation:** The environment is soundscaped pleasantly, with soft music or natural sounds that help promote calmness and reduce anxiety. Additionally, aromatherapy can be used to create a comforting atmosphere.
- **Space Arrangement:** The space arrangement is carefully planned to ensure that the pregnant woman has freedom of movement and access to different comfort resources, such

as Pilates balls, immersion tubs, among others, according to her preferences.

The Symbolism of Childbirth through Placenta Printing

An uncommon practice in many childbirth settings, placenta printing refers to the creation of an artistic impression of the placenta after the baby's birth. This practice has gained popularity in some humanized childbirth approaches as a way to honor the symbolic importance of the placenta and celebrate the connection between the mother and her child. Some details of this stage include

- **Creation of the Impression:** After the baby and placenta are born, the placenta is carefully examined and washed. Then, an artistic impression is made using natural inks on special paper, creating a unique visual representation of the placenta.
- **Symbolic Meaning:** Placenta printing can have deep symbolic meaning for some pregnant women, representing the bond between mother and child, the cycle of life, and fertility. It is a way to honor and recognize the importance of the placenta in the process of gestation and childbirth.
- **Voluntary Option:** It is worth noting that the creation of the placenta print is a voluntary option, and it is up to the pregnant woman and her family to decide whether they wish to participate in this practice. The healthcare team respects the individual choices of the pregnant woman and is available to offer support and guidance, regardless of the decision made.

These three stages emphasize the importance of comprehensive, personalized, and respectful care throughout the childbirth process, contributing to a positive and humanized experience for the woman, her baby, and her family.

Discussion

Humanized childbirth is based on fundamental principles of respect, autonomy, and woman-centered care. This includes creating a welcoming and respectful environment where the woman is encouraged to express her preferences and actively participate in decisions related to childbirth in Brazil's free public healthcare system through the Unified Health System (SUS) [9].

Some key characteristics of humanized childbirth include

- **Respect for Women's Autonomy:** The core of humanized childbirth lies in respecting women's autonomy. This means ensuring that she has the fundamental right to make informed choices about her own childbirth. From choosing the most comfortable birthing position to deciding on pain relief methods, every aspect of the process should be openly discussed with the woman, empowering her to make decisions that align with her needs, desires, and values. Similarly, ensuring the presence of companions chosen by the woman during labor and childbirth is essential to provide emotional and physical support, strengthening her sense of control and security during this intimate and transformative moment [10].
- **Minimization of Unnecessary Interventions:** In the context of humanized childbirth, it is crucial to avoid medical interventions that are not clinically justified. This includes practices such as the excessive use of synthetic oxytocin to speed up labor, routine episiotomies without clear medical necessity, and performing cesarean sections without adequate medical indication. These interventions can increase the risk of complications for the mother and baby, compromising the childbirth experience and postpartum recovery. Therefore, minimizing these unnecessary interventions is essential to promote safe, respectful, and evidence-based childbirth [11].

• **Continuous Emotional Support:** An essential feature of humanized childbirth is the provision of continuous and encouraging emotional support throughout the entire process of labor and childbirth. This support can be offered by healthcare professionals, doulas, family members, or anyone designated by the laboring woman. The goal is to create an environment of trust, safety, and comfort, where the woman feels emotionally supported to cope with the physical and emotional demands of childbirth. Continuous emotional support may include words of encouragement, relaxation techniques, massages, constant physical presence, and the provision of information and support to help the woman make informed decisions throughout the childbirth process [12].

• **Promotion of Mother-Baby Bonding:** Facilitating immediate skin-to-skin contact between mother and baby after birth is a fundamental practice of humanized childbirth. This early contact favors not only the initiation of breastfeeding but also the establishment of an important emotional bond between mother and child. Allowing the mother to hold her baby immediately after birth promotes the release of hormones such as oxytocin, which facilitates emotional bonding and promotes a sense of calm and well-being for both mother and baby. This practice reinforces the human aspect of perinatal care and contributes to a smooth transition to extrauterine life, promoting a positive childbirth experience and positively impacting the baby's early development [13].

Results

In light of the experience, it was evident to see the satisfaction and positive experience of the pregnant women with the childbirth experience. Upon receiving empathetic care, clear and respectful communication, and having their preferences considered in the preparation of the environment and in the practice of placenta printing, they reported having an overall positive and satisfactory experience. Furthermore, the reduction of unnecessary medical interventions led to lower costs for the hospital, assessed through the analysis of data related to the rates of cesarean sections, episiotomies, and other medical procedures during childbirth. Lastly, the results related to the health status and neonatal adaptation, such as Apgar scores and the need for special care after birth, can be considered as indicators of the impact of these practices on the newborn.

Conclusion

The experience of humanized childbirth in Brazil represents a significant advancement in promoting maternal and neonatal health. Although there are still challenges to overcome, the benefits associated with this comprehensive approach to childbirth are undeniable. It is essential that health authorities, healthcare professionals, and society as a whole continue to support and promote humanized childbirth practices as part of a broader effort to improve maternal and neonatal health outcomes in Brazil, which offers this care free of charge and universally.

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