

Fear of childbirth in pregnant women: External and internal factors

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Abstract

Fear of childbirth (FOC) is an important psychological problem that is studied worldwide because it affects the well-being of pregnant women. However, in Russia, this problem does not receive adequate attention among researchers. The purpose of the present study was to investigate the conditionality of fear of childbirth (FOC) in pregnant women by external and internal factors, which we assumed were the reasons for this fear. As external factors, we considered socio-demographic indicators (e.g., age, marital status, level of education, housing, and the attitude of relatives towards pregnancy) as well as indicators of gynecological history (e.g., the term of pregnancy, the outcome of previous pregnancies, and pregnancy complications). As internal (psychological) factors of the fear of childbirth, we considered personal anxiety as well as general inclination towards and negative consequences of different fears (20 types of fears and phobias were examined). The study was conducted with a Russian sample of 76 women at different stages of pregnancy and with different socio-demographic indicators and gynecological histories. The analysis of the results showed the absence of significant differences between women who were pregnant with FOC and those without this fear in terms of the external factors considered in this study. According to the study's data, a general inclination of women to fear is associated with fear of childbirth. However, the findings for the women with FOC did not indicate significant positive correlations between the level of this fear and exposure to any of the 20 types of fear and phobias measured in the study. Furthermore, the results did not detect relationships between the FOC level and women's personal anxiety. The results allow us to conclude that FOC is a separate phenomenon that is not dependent on other phobias and fears. Fear of childbirth has a subjective and highly individual genesis. It is not a direct consequence of objective factors, and it cannot be predicted based on women's personal characteristics (in particular, anxiety). For further study of this problem, we suggest that researchers identify different types of FOC and describe their content as a way to help develop practical methods of providing psychological assistance for women during pregnancy.

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Keywords

Fear of childbirth (FOC), Fears, Personal anxiety, Phobias, Pregnancy