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Immigrant women giving birth in Spain suffer 'great stress,' a study warns

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A study conducted at the University of Granada has concluded that most immigrant women who give birth in Spain suffer "severe stress" and should receive psychological treatment after giving birth to help them overcome disorders such as obsessive compulsive disorder, phobic anxiety, depression or psychoticism. These disorders are caused by "the stress of labor itself combined with other personal stress factors. This is a very stressful moment in women's life due to biological, psychological and social factors".

This study has been conducted by Francisca Pérez Ramírez and coordinated by Inmaculada García García and Isabel Peralta Ramírez at the University of Granada Department of Nursing. The study also revealed that immigrant women generally enter the pregnancy check-up program six weeks later than Spanish women, as they enter it at 12 weeks of gestation, while Spanish women start at 6-7 weeks. As a result, they undergo less ultrasound scans.

Francisca Pérez explains that they found significant differences in immigrant women's attendance to childbirth classes. "Spanish women attend childbirth classes much more frequently than immigrant women, perhaps because these classes are held at work hours or because they are given in Spanish".

Irregular Situation

The primary author of this article explains that immigrant women may experience greater stress "due to the fact that they are illegal immigrants, so they believe that as soon as they enter the hospital they will be deported, or the stress that Muslim women suffer when they have to ask for special food during their in-hospital stay, communication problems, or because they feel discriminated for wearing headscarf".

To carry out this study, 163 postpartum women were sampled between 2009 and 2011 at the University Hospital Virgen de las Nieves, Granada, Spain. All women -- immigrant women and 83 Spanish women-- were asked to answer four questionnaires. In addition, their medical records, partographs and midwifery records were examined.

The researchers analyzed participants' sociodemographic variables (age, country of origin, nationality, years of residence in Spain, administrative status); health habits (smoking, previous diseases); habits related with obstetric formula (number of pregnancies and miscarriages); factors related with current pregnancy (check- ups and ultrasound scans underwent)and newborn information (sex, birthweight, Apgar score at 1 and 5 minutes, or feeding method). Values for optimism, vulnerability to stress and perceived stress were obtained by personal interviews.

In the light of the results of this study, the researcher notes that "we should understand the cultural factors interfering immigrant pregnant women's experiences, and include respect for diversity of beliefs and values in postnatal care.

The results of this study will be partially published in *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*, *Revista Latino-Americana de Enfermagem* and *Anales de Psicología*.

Source: **University of Granada**

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