

Planned motherhood of the modern woman

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The aim of this study was to examine the opinion of pregnant women on motherhood and related beliefs about the maternal instinct, vocation to a parenthood, marital obligation, the obligation of religious and social upbringing of children.

Material and methods: Study was conducted on 200 pregnant women in the range between 20-44 years attending antenatal classes at the City Hospital in Białystok. The material was collected through an original questionnaire which consisted of 26 closed and semi-open questions.

Results: Most respondents (84%) planned their pregnancy, 70% used various methods of contraception before getting pregnant. Among

pregnant women under 30 years old 73% said that they planned their gestation, the number rises to 93% among women over 30 years old. Seventy-five women (60%) under 30 years said they did not use birth control methods.

Conclusions: A significant percentage of respondents present different from widespread views on the maternal instinct, parenting, legalization of their relationship, and responsibility for raising a child, thanks to which they break stereotypes common in Poland. Attending childbirth classes reduces fear of labour, supports women psychologically and allows to find oneself in the new situation.

Keywords: mothers, women, parenthood, Poland

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INTRODUCTION

Every woman has the right to "fulfil herself" thanks to motherhood, which strengthens her position in the family, and is one of the strongest elements of psychological impact. The moment connects a woman to natural world heritage and satisfies her basic needs; it is necessary to maintain the sense of inner harmony and self-esteem [1]. An indifferent woman to the challenge of nature is in the common opinion unfulfilled and emotionally hurt [2,3].

Nowadays, more freedom in making decisions about motherhood can be observed. A single mother and irregular marriage are more frequent phenomena. Sometimes a woman does not want to be a mother, or becomes one too early or too late. Pregnancy is a blessing for ones, for others a huge burden, therefore it should be planned and an effect of a mature decision.

Maternity defines the relationship between a mother and a child. In biological aspect, it consists in having a child whom she gave birth. In the spiritual sense, it constitutes inner maturity of the woman. In the personal sense, it is regarded as a sincere gift that is defined as "a set of characteristics typical for a woman (as a mother) thanks to which she can take care of her child properly". Polish Language Dictionary describes motherhood as "being a mother, and the associated feelings, experiences, duties" [5,6]. In various cultures, it is considered as a natural and fundamental task of a woman and the only way of gaining a higher social position [7].

Pregnancy is a special time for a woman, as well as marriage or partnership. Conception, however, may raise a number of negative reactions, which may be caused by: the relationship with a partner, the age of a woman, partner's awareness, preparation and willingness to have offspring [8,9]. These factors may cause so-called "difficult motherhood" (early, late, lonely, unwanted and unfulfilled one) [10, 11].

Lack of broader sex education is a contributory factor for the early initiation of sexual intercourse that can effect in unwanted pregnancy [12,13]. It does not necessarily apply to unmarried women or teenage girls, but also to marriages [14]. Another aspect of difficult motherhood is its loneliness. The problem in Poland is affecting a growing number of women. There are more and

more single mothers every year. The root of the situation can be seen in: being unmarried, divorce or separation, death of a spouse or being left by a partner. Being a single mother is becoming an aware and individual choice of the woman. Divorced women constitute nearly 1/3 of single-parent families [15,16].

There is an increasing number of infertility that is considered as a life defeat and arouses a sense of parental failure [17,18].

The aim of this study was to analyze the influence of childbirth education on the most common emotions in the process of preparing for motherhood.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study was conducted on 200 pregnant women in the range between 20-44 years attending antenatal classes at the City Hospital name PCK in Białystok between 2nd January 2009 and 1st March 2009. The material was collected through an original questionnaire which consisted of 26 closed and semi-open questions. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. Collected material was analyzed and presented in descriptive and graphic terms.

RESULTS

Full awareness of motherhood allows a woman to prepare properly for pregnancy and provide the child with the best conditions for growth. Most respondents (84%) planned their pregnancy, 70% used various methods of contraception before getting pregnant. Among pregnant women under 30 years old 73% said that they planned their gestation, the number rises to 93% among women over 30 years old. Seventy-five women (60%) under 30 years said they did not use birth control methods. Among women over 30 years the percentage was 24%. (Tab. 1)

The most prevailing emotions that accompany a woman when pregnant were: joy 154 (77%), luck 136 (68%), satisfaction 99 (50%), and hope 58 (29%). Some of them reported anxiety 46 (23%), crying 44 (22%), fear of new problems 44 (22%), surprise 26 (13%), anger 6 (3%), and dislike 2 (1%). (Fig.1)

Table 1. The relationship between women's age and pregnancy planning.

	< 30 years	> 30 years
Planned pregnancy	91 (73%)	70 (93%)
Unplanned pregnancy	34 (27%)	5 (7%)
Usage of contraception	50 (40%)	57 (76%)
Contraception was not used	75 (60%)	18 (24%)

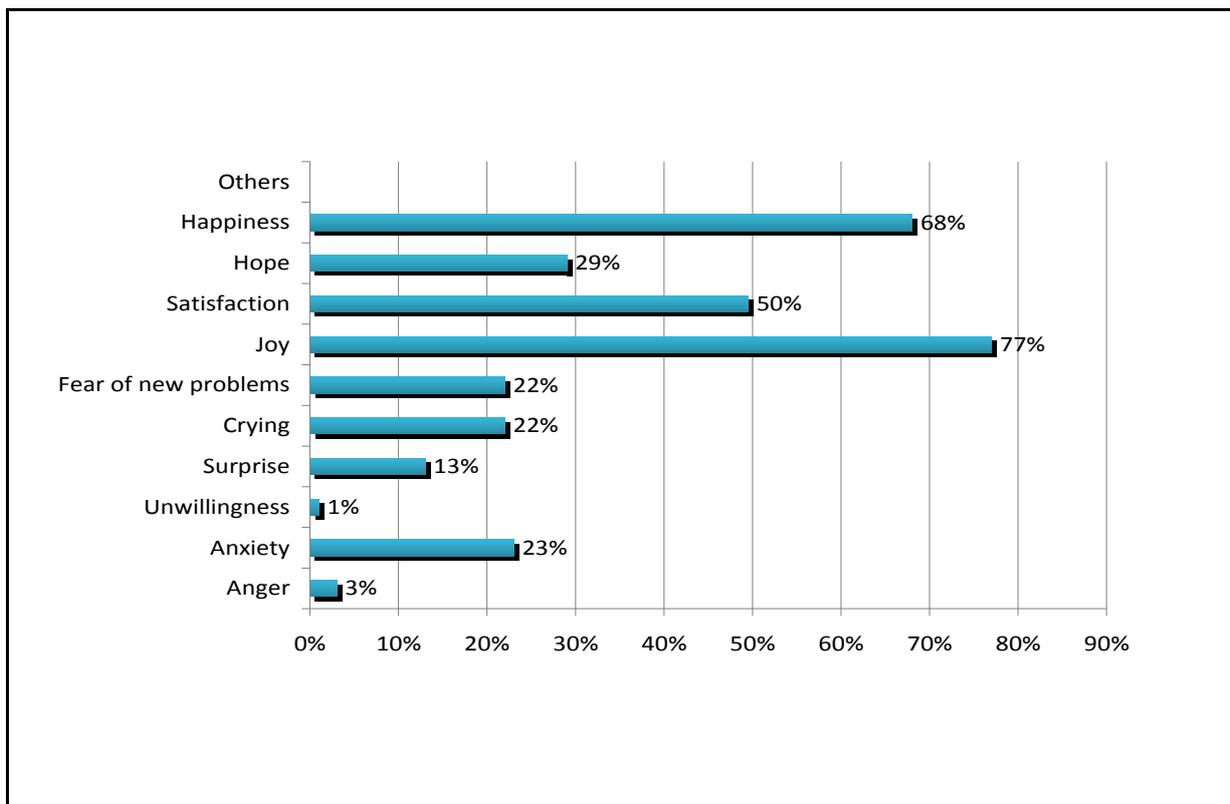


Figure1. Emotions accompanying a woman at the moment of pregnancy confirmation.

Our own research has shown that half of pregnant women consider motherhood as a natural vocation of women, 44% do not share this view and 6% did not answer this question .

According to published studies over 90% of respondents wants to be a mother. Our research shows that about 60% of respondents declare having a natural maternal instinct. Unfortunately, up to 9% of pregnant women have no opinion on this matter. The conviction of having a natural maternal instinct depends on the age of the woman. 45% of respondents under 30 years and twice as many (72%) over 30 years support the view.

In our study it was indicated that the majority of respondents (76%) did not connect

having children with a religious duty, 14% considered it as a necessity, but a large group (10%), unfortunately, have no opinion on this issue. A significant number of respondents (61%) believe that motherhood is the natural and main goal in couple's life, 35% disagree with this thesis and 4% has no opinion on this aspect. The importance of having children in our study confirmed 72% of patients over 30, and 57% under 30 years.

The study confirms the generally accepted conclusion that a contribution to raising the offspring is mainly made by women. With such statements 97% of respondents do not agree, which is definitely a stereotype breaking in Polish society.

The studies also indicated a significant role of antenatal classes in the process of preparing women for motherhood. For a large group of pregnant women (85%) they have brought tranquillity and lowered the fear level but also helped to find oneself in the new situation (80%). The importance of psychological support was underlined by 85% of respondents.

CBOS survey 1994 showed that two thirds of Polish women believe that having children reduces the chances of finding jobs and social advancement. This dependence was underlined by highly educated women, with a predisposition to so-called career. In our own studies, most respondents 168 (83%) believed that the child does not constitute any obstacle to the development of their careers.

DISCUSSION

Polish culture strongly associates a woman with the role of a mother. The conducted studies in 1995, 75.3% of respondents said "a woman should have children to feel fulfilled" [1, 20]. Motherhood is considered to be the main feature of an adult female. The surveys conducted in 2001 in Krasnystaw and Leśniowicach show that in 55% of women pregnancy was not planned. Own research did not confirm this analysis, in which the vast majority of women (84%) planned their pregnancy and 70% used earlier contraception.

Approximately, 45% of Poles claim that the main purpose of marriage is having children. Nearly 97% of Poles declare that they want to have children, nearly half of those surveyed by CBOS, express the desire to have two children, and nearly one quarter thereof them. This confirms the belief that a woman wishing to be 'normal' should give birth to at least one child. A study conducted in 1972 in the U.S.A revealed that couples rarely desire only one child or do not want to have children at all. Similar trends were observed at the turn of the year in Poland. In the work by Duch - Krzystoszek only 3.8% of the respondents have shown no willingness to have children, 5.1% thought that the best model is the family with one child, 57.2% wanted to have two of them, 31.8% three. Our own research has shown that 15% of respondents ruled out next pregnancy and over half of them (59%) planned it in the future [1,7].

On average, 45% of Poles say that the main purpose of a marriage is having children. This result has been confirmed by own research, in which a large part of pregnant women (61%) believe that motherhood is the natural order of things and the main goal in couples' lives [1].

For many years in the common opinion has existed a dogma that the person who should deal with upbringing is the mother [1,3,7]. According to Dawkins' theory "looking after children are

biogenetically mothers' job, thanks to which a new human being may reach a potentially reproductive state and thereby ensure genetic survival of the parental organism". In our study 97% of pregnant respondents did not agree with these findings that believe that the responsibility for the child does not rest only on the mother. This breaks down stereotypes prevalent in Polish society.

Own studies have shown a significant impact of antenatal classes on preparation for motherhood. They gave a sense of calm and minimized the level of anxiety for nearly 85% of pregnant women. The courses helped 80% of pregnant to find themselves in a new situation. Almost half of surveyed women claim that attending antenatal classes should be obligatory.

CONCLUSIONS

1. A significant percentage of respondents present different from widespread views on the maternal instinct, parenting, legalization of their relationship, and responsibility for raising a child, thanks to which they break stereotypes common in Poland.
2. Attending childbirth classes reduces fear of labour, supports women psychologically and allows to find oneself in the new situation.

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