

Original Article

Childbirth Perception in Baby Boomers, Generations X, Y, And Z: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Background: Perception of birth is an important factor that can affect caesarean rates and maternal adaptation. Examining birth perception in all generations can reveal positive and negative changes in birth perception from past to present.

Aim: The aim of this study was to examine the birth perception of Baby boomers, X, Y and Z generations.

Methodology: Forty-six women participated in the study. Data were collected between February and May 2022 via social media platforms using the snowball sampling method. Interviews were conducted by telephone. Two data collection forms were used: The Introductory Information Form and the Semi-structured Interview Form. In this study, qualitative content analysis was performed. Five main themes emerged regarding women's perception of childbirth. They included baby, pain, fear, support, and strength. Baby, pain, and fear were found to be the focus of women's childbirth perceptions in all generations.

Results: Five main themes emerged regarding women's perception of childbirth. They included baby, pain, fear, support, and strength.

Conclusion: Generations Y and Z had a more negative perception of childbirth due to increased responsibilities towards the baby, and their childbirth perceptions were influenced by social media more. Health personnel should be aware that the perception of childbirth can change based on the general characteristics of generations, and they should revise the healthcare they provide according to the characteristics of future generations.

Keywords: Generations; Childbirth Perception; Qualitative Study; Women

Introduction

Although childbirth is often perceived as a happy event, it is sometimes perceived as a frightening, difficult, and unpleasant phenomenon (Karlstrom, Nystedt and Hildingsson, 2015; Taheri et al., 2018). Individual and environmental factors are effective in the differentiation of childbirth perception (Taheri et al., 2018). Communication of healthcare professionals,

childbirth support given, and childbirth experiences heard from different women or the media can be considered environmental factors (Taheri et al., 2018; Aydin and Aktas, 2021). The ability to cope with fear, awareness of childbirth (Isbir, 2023), self-efficacy to cope with childbirth pain (Karlstrom, Nystedt and Hildingsson, 2015), and past childbirth experiences (Shakarami et al., 2021) can be mentioned as individual factors.

Developing technology and changing living conditions over time affect individuals' interests, abilities, thoughts, and personality traits (Shakarami et al., 2021; Bejtkovský, 2016). For this reason, different characteristics are observed between generations (Bejtkovský, 2016). Baby boomers, who were born between 1946 and 1964 (Bejtkovský, 2016), are a sharp-minded, controlling generation (Roberts, 2012), that uses radio and television as the main communication tool (Kolnhofer-Derecskei et al., 2017) and attaches importance to face-to-face communication (Venter, 2017). Born between 1965 and 1976, generation X attaches importance to education, is sensitive to social events, respects authority, and has been familiar with most of the technological developments, but has weak use of technological products (Bejtkovský, 2016). The participation of women in business life started to increase in generation X, and there were breaks in the classical family structure (Şenturan et al., 2016). It is stated that birth rates in the X generation have decreased by approximately 15% (Tapscott, 2009). Born between 1977 and 1995, generation Y (Bejtkovský, 2016) has a high level of education, is fond of freedom, is prone to technology use, adapts to change and innovations, and constantly seeks answers to the question of "Why" (Şenturan et al., 2016). Generation Z included individuals born in 1996 and later (Bejtkovský, 2016). They want to access information quickly, are creative, realistic, and fond of freedom, believe in equality in the social structure, can be motivated by their social relationships, are curious about technology, and are prone to technology use (Hope, 2016). Time causes the differentiation of personal characteristics between generations and it may have changed women's perception of childbirth, as well (Shakarami et al., 2021). Perception of birth is a factor affecting women's mode of delivery (Loke, Davies and Mak, 2019) and maternal role adaptation (Hennekam et al., 2019). Although there are studies in the literature examining the effects of intergenerational differences on concepts such as breastfeeding and co-parenting (Xiao & Loke, 2022; Wagner et al., 2019), it is not known how it affects the perception of birth. For this reason, examining the perception of birth in different generations is important to determine to

provide care in line with the expectations of the generations to give birth. Therefore, the aim of this study was to examine the birth perception of Baby boomers, X, Y and Z generations.

Materials and Methods

Study design: A phenomenological qualitative approach was adopted since this approach allows participants to freely express their thoughts. The phenomenological approach was chosen because it allows one to comprehend a notion or an event by looking into the experiences and perceptions of a person connected to that event (Houser, 2014). This study was reported as recommended in The Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (SRQR) guide (O'Brien et al., 2014).

Participants: The sample consisted of women born between 1946 and 2003. The reason for limiting birth years (1946 and 2003) was to include women aged ≥ 18 years in the study. Women were reached through snowball sampling (chain sampling) between February and May 2022. Snowball sampling is a nonprobability sampling technique where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances. This approach was preferred because it is effective in identifying individuals who can be a rich source of information (Houser, 2014; Streubert and Carpenter, 2011). The first women to be sampled were reached by announcing the research on social media platforms. These women were asked who they would suggest to include in the study. By asking this question, other individuals to be sampled were determined until data saturation was achieved. The study was completed with a total of 46 women. This sample size was deemed adequate as no new information was presented and repetition and confirmation of previously collected data occurred after 9-11 interviews (Houser, 2014; Streubert and Carpenter, 2011).

Data collection: Data were collected through interviews on the phone. Two data collection forms were used: The Introductory Information Form and the Semi-structured Interview Form. The introductory information form consisted of questions about sociodemographic information, year of childbirth, education level, number of parities, and the mode of last childbirth. The

semi-structured interview form included the following questions: “What comes to your mind when you think of childbirth?” and “Who/what influenced you in the formation of your thoughts about childbirth?” To clarify participants’ responses, improve their confirmability, and offer participants a chance to change their responses, the researcher read the summary of what they said after each question and asked for their confirmation. All the interviews were conducted by the same female author via telephone on the day and time determined by the participants. Every woman was interviewed once individually. Each interview lasted 25-40 minutes and was audio recorded.

Data analysis: Content analysis was employed in this study (Kyngäs and Mikkonen, 2020). Before the analysis, the interviews were documented. Analyses were conducted by two researchers independently of each other. The codes, categories, and themes that emerged as a result of the analysis were discussed by the researchers and a consensus was reached.

Ethical considerations: Approval was received from the Pamukkale University Medical Ethics Committee in 2021 (November 30, 2021, number 21). Verbal and written consent was obtained from the participants. The study was conducted within the scope of the Declaration of Helsinki.

Results

Participants' demographic and obstetric characteristics

The mean age of women was 43.23±15.83. Of the women, 19 were university graduates, 15 were high school graduates, and 12 were primary school graduates. More than half of them (n=28) were employed. Most women had a middle-income level (n=40). Twenty-eight women in all generation groups had given childbirth before. Among those who had already given childbirth, 23 women were multiparous, and 17 had a caesarean section in their last childbirth (Table 1).

Themes

Participants' perceptions of childbirth were grouped under five main themes: baby, pain, fear, support, and power.

Theme one: Baby

All of the participants mentioned the baby while expressing their perception of childbirth. Most women stated that having a baby connected them to life and gave them excitement, hope, and happiness. Some participants stated that the childbirth of a baby was a miraculous event and that the baby evoked a sense of vitality, freshness, relief, insomnia, being energetic, and responsibility.

“The idea of being the mother of a child gives me happiness and energy.” (P28-Gen Z)

“It is a miracle to give childbirth to a living thing; in fact, another living thing emerges from one living thing.” (P21-Gen Y)

“Birth is a miracle...the best thing that ever happened to me in life. Being a mother is a good feeling. When I look back, I say it was the best thing in my life” (She cried) (P41-Baby-Boomer).

“Birth is a novelty for a baby ... Everything it encounters in this world is new.” (P25-Gen X)

“It reminds me of insomnia. When the baby is born, it constantly cries, has gas pains, and wants to suckle. You get up at night.” (P36-Gen Y)

Most of the women who perceived childbirth as a responsibility were in generations Y and Z and had not given childbirth, yet. Women stated that increased responsibilities with parenting would limit their personal care, freedom, and productivity. Some women stated that they did not want to have children for these reasons and that they postponed their marriage.

“Should I take time for myself or the child? I don't think it will do me any good.” (P5-Gen Z)

“In an age where I can enjoy my time and be productive in other subjects, this reminds me that this children issue should be postponed a little longer and that I should not be in a hurry.” (P35-Gen Y)

“I have got used to a certain level of comfort. So the responsibility of a child

causes me to delay my marriage.”
(P22-Gen Y)

Theme two: Pain

All of the participants in all generations mentioned pain while expressing their perception of childbirth. Women mentioned the pain associated with caesarean and/or vaginal delivery and added that the pain was excruciating.

“Pain is very difficult to bear.” (P11-Baby boomers)

“I think there will be a lot of pain in childbirth.” (P28-Gen Z)

“I think the birth pain is very severe.”
(P44-Gen Y).

Theme three: Fear

All of the participants in all generations perceived childbirth as a frightening event. Women stated that they were afraid of childbirth pain, episiotomy, delivery table, complications that may occur during delivery, and death.

“I feel like my cells are going to be broken into pieces... I'm afraid of the pain I'm going to experience during the delivery phase.” (P28-Gen Z)

“That delivery table is like hell... I swear it's like hell...” (P31-Baby boomers)

“I was afraid of not being able to give childbirth, of dying, and that my child would die.” (P16-Gen X)

“Birth makes me think of a terrifying movie scene.” (P44-Gen-Y)

Causes of fear were specified as negative childbirth experiences experienced, heard, or witnessed. Witnessing negative childbirth experiences mostly caused fear in healthcare professionals. Childbirth videos on social media caused fear mostly in generations Y and Z. Some baby boomers have stated that they are not afraid of birth because they do not know what will happen with their first birth. However, they experienced fear in their second birth.

“My wife's aunt visited me when I was giving childbirth. “Your back will hurt like a fracture,” she said. I

was already afraid, but when she came and told me this, I was even more afraid.” (P26-Baby boomers)

“I was too young. You don't know... We've never been to a doctor. When you don't know, you probably don't have any worry or fear. I lived without knowing anything. But at my second birth, I was afraid because I knew what was going to happen to me.” (P41-Baby Boomers).

“The first thing that comes to mind when I think of childbirth is fear because they scared me... They told me that women couldn't get up right away, couldn't walk as they used to after giving childbirth and that the pain was a very bad experience.”
(P9-Gen Y)

“My profession was completely effective in my fears. I saw mothers giving childbirth. The first baby I delivered was a stillbirth.” (P24-Gen X)

“These fears developed after watching childbirth videos and seeing the pain my aunt had during childbirth.” (P28-Gen Z)

Theme four: Support

Participants who had a childbirth experience mentioned that they felt the need for support during childbirth. They stated that they had more comfortable childbirth when they received the support of health professionals, their spouses, family members, and friends and that they felt bad especially when they did not have support from health personnel. Participants who did not have a childbirth experience mentioned the importance of support from health personnel during childbirth.

“You need someone to hold your hand and give you some water. There must be someone you can rely on and who you won't be afraid of.” (P44-Gen Y).

Women in the baby boomers mentioned the lack of support during childbirth most. Most of these women stated that they had given childbirth at home, they had not received enough support during childbirth, they had

felt alone, and that they had had a difficult childbirth experience. The majority of baby boomer generation women reported having a challenging birth, giving birth at home, felt alone, and not getting enough support during labour.

“I had a difficult childbirth experience. I had given childbirth at home and I was alone. I gave childbirth clinging onto here and there. I cut the umbilical cord myself. I swaddled the baby myself.” (P26-Baby boomers)

“I remember holding the nurse's apron when they pressed against my stomach so that the baby would be born. “What are you doing,” she asked. “Imagine what would happen if everyone pulled me like this,” she said. I felt upset then.” (P11-Baby boomers)

Theme five: Power

Some participants mentioned that giving childbirth was a challenging phenomenon, so giving childbirth felt strong. Women stated that they felt stronger, proud, successful, refreshed, reborn, and that they overcame difficulties after giving childbirth.

“I used to quit all the tasks I started. But I made it. For the first time, I was able to wait until the end. I was proud of myself for being able to get through this process.” (P13-Gen Z)

“It was difficult as two souls were separated from each other. When it was over, I felt like I was reborn.” (P26-Baby boomers)

Discussion

In this study, most women expressed the childbirth of the baby as a miraculous, hopeful, exciting, and happy event. In a study, it was determined that women thought that giving childbirth and seeing their baby felt happy and exciting (Rilby et al., 2012).

Unlike the literature, most of the women in generations Y and Z in this study perceived childbirth as a responsibility. These women talked about their increased sense of responsibility with the coming of the baby and that parenting would limit their personal care, freedom, and productivity.

The reason why childbirth was perceived as responsibility may have been due to the characteristic features of these generations. Characteristically, generation Y is fond of individual freedoms and loves to travel. Generation Z is also fond of individual freedom and has a pessimistic view of the future financially (Hope, 2016). These features may have contributed to the increased responsibilities in these individuals in response to the positive emotions brought about by childbirth and parenthood.

In this study, all of the women in all generations mentioned pain while expressing their perception of childbirth. It was determined that childbirth pain was perceived as a challenging and bad experience for women. The reason for the existence of the thought of pain in childbirth was negative experiences that women heard, witnessed, or experienced. In previous studies, it was determined that women thought that it was necessary to experience pain to be a mother (Malacrida and Boulton, 2012), and that they would experience pain during childbirth (Aziato et al., 2017).

Fear of childbirth is experienced by many women (Sercekus et al., 2020; do Souto et al., 2022). In this study, it was determined that women in all generations feared childbirth. They stated that negative childbirth experiences that they heard, witnessed, or experienced caused this fear. Negative childbirth experiences witnessed mostly created fear in health workers. In previous studies, it was stated that women feared childbirth pain, complications (Sercekus and Okumus, 2009), episiotomy, caesarean section, and death (Demšar et al., 2018).

Table 1. Demographic and obstetric characteristics.

No	Generation	Educational status	Working status	Economic status	Profession	Have you given birth?	Number of birhs	Type of last birh
1	Gen Z	High school	Yes	Middle income	Nurse	No	-	-
2	Gen X	High school	Yes	Middle income	Public servant	Yes	Multiparous	C/S
3	Gen Y	High school	No	Middle income	Housewife	Yes	Multiparous	C/S
4	Gen X	University	Yes	Middle income	Pharmacist	No	-	-
5	Gen Z	University	Yes	Middle income	Student	No	-	-
6	Gen Z	High school	Yes	Middle income	Employee	No	-	-
7	Gen X	University	Yes	Middle income	Nurse	No	-	-
8	Gen Y	University	Yes	Middle income	Public servant	No	-	-
9	Gen Y	High school	No	Middle income	Housewife	Yes	Multiparous	C/S
10	Baby Boomers	Primary education	No	Middle income	Housewife	Yes	Multiparous	V/B
11	Baby Boomers	Primary education	No	Low income	Housewife	Yes	Multiparous	C/S
12	Gen Z	High school	No	Middle income	Housewife	Yes	Primiparous	C/S
13	Baby Boomers	High school	Yes	Low income	Public servant	Yes	Multiparous	C/S
14	Gen Z	High school	No	Middle income	Housewife	Yes	Primiparous	V/B
15	Gen X	University	Yes	Middle income	Midwifery	No	-	-
16	Gen X	Primary education	No	Middle income	Housewife	Yes	Multiparous	C/S
17	Gen X	High school	Yes	Middle income	Employee	No	-	-
18	Gen Z	University	Yes	Middle income	Teacher	Yes	Multiparous	V/B
19	Gen Z	University	Yes	Low income	Dental technician	Yes	Primiparous	C/S
20	Baby Boomers	Primary education	Yes	Middle income	Farmer	Yes	Multiparous	V/B
21	Gen Y	University	No	Middle income	Child development specialist	No	-	-
22	Gen Y	University	Yes	Middle income	Sales responsible	No	-	-
23	Gen Z	High school	No	Middle income	Housewife	Yes	Primiparous	C/S
24	Gen Z	High school	Yes	Middle income	Child development specialist	Yes	Multiparous	C/S
25	Gen X	University	Yes	Middle income	Banker	No	-	-

26	Baby Boomers	Primary education	No	Low income	Retired	Yes	Multiparous	V/B
27	Baby Boomers	Primary education	No	Middle income	Retired	Yes	Multiparous	V/B
28	Gen Z	University	Yes	Middle income	Teacher	No	-	-
29	Gen Z	University	Yes	Middle income	Nurse	No	-	-
30	Baby Boomers	Primary education	No	Middle income	Housewife	Yes	Multiparous	C/S
31	Baby Boomers	Primary education	Yes	Middle income	Employee	Yes	Multiparous	V/B
32	Baby Boomers	High school	No	High income	Retired Nurse	Yes	Multiparous	C/S
33	Gen Y	Primary education	Yes	Middle income	Employee	Yes	Multiparous	C/S
34	Gen Y	University	Yes	Middle income	Nurse	Yes	Primiparous	C/S
35	Gen Y	University	Yes	Middle income	Nurse	No	-	-
36	Gen Y	High school	Yes	Middle income	Employee	Yes	Multiparous	C/S
37	Gen Y	University	Yes	Middle income	Nurse	No	-	-
38	Gen X	High school	No	Middle income	Housewife	Yes	Multiparous	C/S
39	Gen X	Primary education	No	Low income	Housewife	Yes	Multiparous	C/S
40	Baby Boomers	Primary education	No	Middle income	Housewife	Yes	Multiparous	V/B
41	Baby Boomers	High school	No	Middle income	Retired	Yes	Multiparous	V/B
42	Baby Boomers	Primary education	No	Middle income	Housewife	Yes	Multiparous	V/B
43	Gen X	University	Yes	Middle income	Nurse	Yes	Multiparous	V/B
44	Gen Y	University	Yes	Middle income	Nurse	No	-	-
45	Gen Z	University	Yes	Middle income	Nurse	No	-	-
46	Gen Z	University	Yes	Middle income	Midwifery	No	-	-

C/S: Cesarean section, V/B: Vaginal Birth, Gen: Generation

It was determined that these fears (Munkhondya et al., 2020) were caused by negative childbirth experiences witnessed or experienced (do Souto et al., 2022). In addition, studies also revealed that healthcare professionals were affected by negative childbirth experiences that they witnessed (Aydin and Aktas, 2021) and that these experiences were likely to cause fear of childbirth (Sercekus and Okumus, 2009).

In this study, it was determined that the birth videos on social media also created fear of birth, mostly in women in the Y and Z generation. In generation Y, the Internet developed rapidly, and the use of the Internet became widespread (Laor and Galily, 2022). Generation Z was born into the digital world, and the use of global communication and social media increased through the Internet (Swartz and Huf, 2017). The frequent use of the Internet and social media by these two generations can explain the fact that they are more influenced by social media.

The support of spouses, peers, family, and health personnel is important during childbirth and in the postpartum period (Onchonga et al., 2021). In this study, women talked about their need for support at childbirth and its importance. The women in the baby boomers generation stated that they were not adequately supported and therefore felt lonely at childbirth. The fact that most women in this generation had to give childbirth at home and alone due to the opportunities of the period they lived in caused their childbirths to be difficult. In the literature, it has been reported that the presence of social support and accessibility to health personnel make women feel safe and that women who do not feel safe are afraid (Onchonga et al., 2021). In addition, it has been determined that healthcare personnel behaving negatively create fear and anxiety and that women are afraid of being alone (Onchonga et al., 2021).

In this study, it was determined that women in all generations thought that childbirth was difficult and that they felt stronger, proud, successful, reborn, and that they overcame difficulties because they succeeded in this difficult phenomenon. In studies on the childbirth experience of women, it was determined that they felt proud (Karlstrom et

al., 2015), and strong (Nilsson et al., 2013) because they coped with childbirth pain.

Conclusion: The baby, pain, and fear were at the centre of women's childbirth perceptions. Generations Y and Z had a negative perception of childbirth compared to other generations due to their responsibilities towards the baby. Social media was found to negatively affect the childbirth perception of generations Y and Z. Creating a positive childbirth perception can provide a comfortable and pleasing childbirth experience. For this reason, health personnel should take an active role in providing women with access to reliable and accurate information sources about childbirth and giving continuous supportive care during childbirth.

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