

Men attend childbirth classes for partner's sake

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Although their involvement is very different, childbirth is an important shared experience for the first-time father and his partner, yet men generally attend childbirth classes only for their partner's sake, reveals research from the University of Gothenburg, Sweden.

The [men](#) from western Sweden who were interviewed in depth for the thesis thought it only natural for the focus to be on the woman, as it is she who carries, delivers and, perhaps, breastfeeds the baby. At the same time, men's secondary role in childbirth classes can make the transition to fatherhood harder.

"Some of the dads said that they'd asked the [midwife](#) questions only for the midwife to direct her answers to the mum," says midwife Åsa Premberg, author of the thesis. "It's important that men too have an opportunity to talk about their fears and ask the midwife questions if they're to feel it's worth taking part."

Childbirth classes are a form of preparation for childbirth and parenthood, but the men in the studies found that the classes were aimed mainly at the mums-to-be. For men, childbirth classes are mostly a ritual that they attend for their partner's sake.

"Men seem to have other sources of information ahead of childbirth, such as their workmates or relatives," says Premberg.

Fathers also play a secondary role during childbirth, of course, and the

thesis shows that this involves supporting the woman and ensuring that she is not disturbed or worried unnecessarily, while at the same time attempting to conceal their own frustration and concern. The woman's pain, fear of the unknown and gender-related notions of masculinity complicate the man's involvement in the delivery room.

"A man who is close to tears might be advised to go and get a breath of fresh air," says Premberg. "One man described how he was consoled by staff, but felt uncomfortable with this. Men react differently in this situation, and there are no easy answers."

During the first year of fatherhood, the men prioritised building their own relationship with the baby. It was also important to master the overwhelming new task of fatherhood, not to lose their own sense of self, and to manage to look after the baby on their own. Fathers found that their contact with the baby made them more sensitive and responsive, which also affected them in other situations.

Åsa Premberg considers it important for the support provided during childbirth classes, childbirth itself and early parenthood to reflect an awareness of how the new situation and gender issues affect the man:

"There's a need for support aimed specifically at men both before and after childbirth. This will benefit not only the man himself but also the whole family."

To measure first-time fathers' experiences of childbirth, a questionnaire was developed and validated on the basis of the interview studies in the thesis, which had the sensitivity to distinguish between groups known to have differing birth experiences.

Provided by University of Gothenburg

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