

Abstract

Understanding Postpartum Mothers' Experiences and Assessing the Quality of Life- Related to Episiotomy: A Mixed Methods Study

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Background: Episiotomy is a surgical incision performed at 7'O clock position on the perineum to facilitate the delivery of a baby. The routine practice of performing an episiotomy is not recommended according to evidence-based guidelines from the World Health Organization (WHO).

Objectives: Understanding postpartum mothers' experiences and assessing the Quality of Life (QOL) related to episiotomy in Teaching Hospital Ratnapura (THR), Sri Lanka.

Methods: A two-phase explanatory sequential design in mixed-method approach was used. A previously validated, psychometrically evaluated, self-administered close-ended Maternal Postpartum QOL Instrument (MPQOL-1) was used to assess the QOL of postpartum mothers (n=131) attending postnatal clinics of THR. From this quantitative sample, 15 mothers (n=15) with moderate QOL were identified and face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted to understand their experience related to episiotomy. The viewing method in the narrative approach was used to present the findings.

Results: The highest episiotomy-related QOL score was observed in the partner support sub-scale (M = 18.21, SD = 2.81), while the lowest was in the breastfeeding and newborn care sub-scale (M = 10.63, SD = 3.57). Primi mothers reported the lowest QOL score in breastfeeding and newborn care (M = 9.90, SD = 3.91), with scores improving as parity increased ($\rho = 0.251, p = 0.029$). The four themes that emerged from the qualitative phase were "physical

suffering, being psychologically embarrassed, it is a woman's duty, and being satisfied with family support".

Conclusion: Parity, postpartum period, and the number of episiotomies significantly influence postpartum women's quality of life, suggesting that these factors should be prioritized in maternal healthcare strategies. Societal norms, pain management, and communication about medical procedures like episiotomy are crucial aspects that can either hinder or enhance a mother's postnatal experience.

Keywords: *Episiotomy, Quality of Life, Experience, Postpartum mother*