

The uncertainty of waiting for childbirth” Phenomenological study of the lived experiences of women with high risk pregnancy in Mpumalanga Province

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Introduction: Obstetric medicine often ignores the emotional aspect of pregnant women with high risk pregnancy. Furthermore, not enough is known about high-risk pregnant women and their experiences of waiting for childbirth.

Aim: The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry is to explore and understand how waiting for childbirth in women with high-risk pregnancy is like.

Method: This study used descriptive phenomenological inquiry to explore the lived experiences of women diagnosed with pregnancy complications that put them under a classification of high-risk pregnancy. The study setting was special clinics or high-risk clinics located in two hospitals in Nkangala District Municipality of Mpumalanga Province. The participants were selected using purposive sampling and in-depth conversational single and multiple interviews were conducted. Inductive thematic analysis approach was used to analyse transcripts.

Findings: Fifteen high-risk pregnant women were interviewed, their ages ranged from 22 to 43 years. The women had several comorbid conditions and pregnancy induced hypertension (PIH) was the highest high risk condition, ten women had previous miscarriages, one participant had seven unexplained miscarriages and the rest of the women had between one and five miscarriages. Uncertainty about pregnancy outcome emerged as one of the key themes underlying the experiences of women with high risk pregnancy. The women experience uncertainty throughout the journey of waiting for childbirth as often the outcome of the pregnancy is unpredictable. They expressed fears and uncertainty about birth, the health of the fetus, and potential loss of the unborn baby. Fears of foetal death was commonly expressed by those with previous miscarriages who grief for the potential loss of the current pregnancy.

Conclusion: Uncertainty was exacerbated by the gravity and intensity of the high risk condition as well as not knowing how the high risk conditions will affect their health and their babies. This emotion, women with high risk pregnancy experience throughout the journey of waiting for childbirth. The findings provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of waiting for childbirth in high risk pregnancy that should be used by nurses to provide appropriate care and coping strategies for women as they wait for childbirth.

Key words; high risk pregnancy, child birth, hospitalization, fear, Mpumalanga, South Africa

Advocacy message

Nurses are often the ones who have the primary contact with women with high risk pregnancy in high risk clinics and can provide the emotional support they need during their routine clinic visits or hospitalization. The findings will contribute towards creating awareness and understanding for nurses.