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PS12 – Keeping Birth Normal II

**O 42 Episiotomy: Views and perceptions of Saudi women experiencing episiotomy**

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Maternity clinicians apply episiotomy to facilitate vaginal delivery and prevent severe perineal tears. However, routine or restrictive episiotomy practice in birthing care remains a controversial from the onset of its introduction. There is lack of studies reporting women voices and personal experiences of episiotomy. This study explored women' voices and personal experience and perceptions of episiotomy among Saudi primiparous from the phenomenological perspective. Five primiparous married women aged between 20 to 40 years were non-randomly selected from one public hospital in Riyadh (Saudi Arabia). Upon signing their informed consents, the participants were privately interviewed (in Arabic) using semi-structured guidelines. All interview sessions were voice-recorded and translated to English by a female translator. Thematic analysis of the collected data revealed that post-episiotomy pain was the most prominent feature of 'bad experience' theme among the participants. The perineal trauma reduced mobility and daily activities including dyspareunia. Importantly, they admitted to be glad for having undergone the procedure. Surprisingly, they also highlighted that they were willing to undergo the procedure again for an opportunity to improve the perineum condition to enhance their self-esteem. From the study findings and the available evidence, restrictive episiotomy should be embraced in birthing care to enhance maternal experience and satisfaction. This can be achieved through development of evidence-based guidelines on obstetrics circumstances that necessitate episiotomy procedure. On the other hand, women need to be educated about episiotomy and its health-related indication, advantages and disadvantages and that it cannot be conducted upon request.