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Water Birth: A New Dimension in Indian Scenario

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ABSTRACT:

A water birth occurs when at least some of the labour and delivery processes—or both—take place while the mother is submerged in a birthing pool filled with warm water. It might happen at home, in a hospital, or a birthing facility. A pregnant woman can go through labour and delivery in a warm water tub during a water birth. A water birth can take place at home, in a birthing facility, or in a hospital that has the necessary equipment. While some hospitals may not permit true water births, they might let a woman give birth in bed after moving from the water during labour.

Keywords: Hydrotherapy, water birth, Labour, birth in water

Introduction

A water birth means at least part of labor, delivery, or both happen while the woman in a birth pool filled with warm water. It can take place in a hospital, a birthing center, or at home.

During water immersion in labor, woman gets into a tub or pool of warm water during the first stage of labor, before the baby is born. In a water birth, the women remains in the water during the pushing phase and during delivery of the baby (Nutter et al. 2014a). The baby is then brought to the surface of the water after he or she is born. A water birth may be followed by the birth of the placenta in or out of the water.

The term land birth is often used in water birth research to refer to a birth in which the baby is born on dry land not in a tub. The word hydrotherapy is sometimes used to describe the use of water during labor and/or birth.

Water birth was first reported in an 1805 medical journal, and became more popular in the 1980s and 1990s. The safety of water immersion during labor is well accepted (Cluett & Burns 2009; Shaw-Battista 2017). However, on the other hand, people in the United States (U.S.) and some other countries disagree about the safety of water birth.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), which sets guidelines for pregnancy and childbirth care in the U.S., says a water birth during the first stage of labor may have some benefits but delivering the baby underwater should be considered an experimental procedure with risks.

The use of a birthing pool during the first stage of labor might help ease pain, decreases the need of anesthesia and also shorten the duration of labour. A warm bath helps the mother to relax and can also help her feel more comfortable. A warm bath might help the mother to relax and can also help her feel more in control. Floating in water helps you move around more easily than in bed, too.

Some science suggests that the water may lower chances of severe vaginal tearing. And it may improve blood flow to the uterus. But study results about these points aren't clear.

Waterbirth In and Around World

The concept of water birth is relatively new to India. However, water births can be traced way back to the legends of South Pacific Islanders giving birth in shallow seawater. In some parts of the world today, such as Guyana, in South America, women go to a special place at the river to give birth. Giving birth in water, rather than labouring in air is a relatively recent development in the Western world. The first water birth in Europe that we know about was in 1803 in France. A mother whose labour had been extremely long and difficult was finally helped to give birth in a tub of warm water.

In the 1970s, some doctors in Russia and France became interested in ways of helping babies make the transition from life in the womb to life outside as smooth as possible. They were concerned for the care a woman receives in labour.

Their perception was that modern maternity care was somewhere making birth traumatic for babies and some doctors thought babies could be affected for life because of the way they were delivered. Water birth seems to offer babies a more peaceful journey from the womb into their mother's arms and also as help the mother to cope up with the pain during delivery. Babies are bathed in warm water as they emerge from the birth canal, and the pool environment feels similar to the intrauterine environment. Their doctors noted how calm babies were after they had been born in water. They appeared more relaxed and were eager to have eye contact with their mums and to breastfeed. During the 1980s and 1990s, interest in water birth grew in Europe and Canada.

Water Birth In India

Water birth is a relatively recent and rare offering in India. The first water birth we know in India was reported in 2007 in capital city Delhi. Water birth facilities are being adopted in different cities. It is a slowly growing trend in India. There is also a strong disagreement on the safety of water birth. Due to this, and lack of enough evidence to either support or discourage water birth, it is not recommended by most doctors in India.

Normal and Caesarean Delivery In India

The latest National Family Health Survey (NFHS) may have brought the long awaited good news of population stabilization, but it also shows that while there have been fewer births than before, a higher proportion of those being born are being delivered through caesarean section (C-section).

The fifth NFHS — done in two phases between June 2019 and January 2020, and January 2020 and April 2021, and released by the health ministry Wednesday — showed that the national C-section rate is 21.5 per cent, higher than what the World Health Organization terms “ideal”, 10-15 per cent. The number has also gone up since NFHS 4 (conducted in 2015-16), when the percentage stood at 17.2.

Far more worrying, however, is the growing disparity in the number of C-section births at government and private sector facilities. At the national level, 47.4 per cent babies born in the private sector are being delivered by surgical methods, as compared to just 14.3 per cent in the government sector.

The disparity in the two numbers has deepened since the last family health survey. In the NFHS 4, the proportion of C-sections was 40.9 per cent in the private sector against 11.9 per cent in the government sector. Experts say there could be several reasons for the growing disparity, among them, the increased health insurance coverage in India since the launch of the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana in September 2018.

The PMJAY provides an annual health coverage of Rs 5 lakh to eligible families. C-sections are what are known in insurance parlance as “moral hazard” procedures — one that’s often done without medical reasons as the payment is assured for an insured person.

Process of Water Birth

A water birth experience can vary and will not be the same for every mother as like normal delivery or a c-section. The standard process, however, starts when the mother is in active labour and then the mother is asked to get into the water pool. There the mother can adopt any position as per her comfort. The water temperature is monitored carefully and customized according to the mother’s needs. The mother’s temperature is checked periodically, and the baby’s health is also observed using waterproof equipment. The mother may neglect her nutritional and hydration needs while in the pool. This is why she will be asked to take in small quantities of soft fruit, curd, etc. A Birthing Partner or companion can also play an active role here by making sure nutrition and hydration stays consistent throughout, as the labouring body is working especially hard. When the birth is imminent, the mother is encouraged to be on their knees. At this point in time, some mothers ask to come out of the pool while some prefer to stay in. Once the baby is born, the baby is gently pushed and lifted up to the mother’s chest. They are allowed some time to stay in the warm water together in order to settle themselves and recover. Once ready, they are helped out of the pool, dried off and warmed up, and carried over to a clean and a cosy bed.

Benefits to mothers

There are several studies that have been done on the potential benefits of water births. To generalize this, more are needed. Many women who have chosen water births have reported positive effects on their birth experience all the same. Some women have found giving birth in water to be soothing, helping to ease stress and even calm their newborn baby. These kinds of benefits have also been reported by women who have chosen only to labor (but not deliver) in water, which is often called hydrotherapy. Some of the benefits women have reported include: Warm baths are already an everyday way to relax. So, it is not hard to imagine why being immersed in a warm bath during labor could have the same relaxation benefits. Some say this may help to lower mom’s blood pressure, making for a calmer experience overall. Because of water’s buoyancy, many women find it easier to move and reposition themselves during labor, which can help contractions progress more smoothly. Since the warm water in the birthing tub can help with relaxation, it may also trigger the release of more endorphins and improve blood flow to the uterine muscles, which can help a woman naturally handle labor pains.

Cons of Water Birth

Water labors and births are generally only recommended for women with low-risk, single pregnancies, and who have reached term. This is because any complication during labor or delivery can be further complicated by the need to get the mother safely out of the water.

While there have been several studies on the potential benefits of hydrotherapy and water births, experts agree that more research needs to be done. Plus, many say more research is especially needed on the potential risks of delivering in water. The time that the baby spends underwater during a water birth is often a top concern for many care professionals. Since blood, other fluids and solids are a natural part of labor and delivery, babies could be exposed to bacteria if they open their eyes or mouth underwater. And that could possibly lead to infection. However, so far there’s been no evidence of an increase in infection for babies delivered by water birth.

Conclusion: - Birthing women can get non-pharmacological pain alleviation and fewer unnecessary and frequently routine intrapartum interventions by submerging themselves in water during labour and delivery. Water birthing mothers are more likely to give birth naturally and spontaneously and require less intrapartum interventions. There are no additional dangers for neonates born to mothers who use water immersion during labour and delivery in comparison to neonates born to women who do not.

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