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Pregnancy, pain & empowerment: Women share birthing experience

A lot of women in India face trauma during birthing, especially in government hospitals: Experts

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For representational purposes

By Renuka Kalpana

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HYDERABAD: What almost felt impossible happened with the 30-year-old Poojitha, a software engineer with locomotive challenges, when she had a normal delivery a few months ago. Having no control over her lower body due to Spina Bifida, she never thought she could even be a mother.

“Thanks to the supportive husband, doctors, physiotherapist and midwives in the hospital who helped me to do so,” Poojitha said speaking in the Better Birthing conference in Hyderabad on Sunday. And the ‘White-Collar’ environment suddenly changed into an emotional haven for the women in attendance to share their traumatic and heartwarming experiences.

In partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Fernandez Hospital Educational and Research Foundation hosted a two-day conference to raise awareness of the critical issue of improving the experiences of mothers during pregnancy, labour and childbirth by reducing unnecessary medical interventions including C-sections. Many like Poojitha shared their experiences of being a proud parent.

Poojitha's son Nivaan is now one and a half years old. The doctor with whom she initially started the consultation for pregnancy suggested Poojitha to go to a more inclusive hospital. To manage pregnancy with Spina Bifida she had to go through physiotherapy exercises which she could not afford to miss even for a single day. She even reduced her intake of her favourite food, chocolate and icecream to almost none. "The only motivation to bear all the pain was the baby growing inside," Poojitha said. She was not just able to deliver a child but also received respectful maternity care from the midwives of the Fernandez Hospital.

Like her, the experiences of Asma Maniar, a teacher and Anupama Kumar Vijay Anand, the founder of 'Vriksham Pregnancy Care' in Tamil Nadu, during their first pregnancies were traumatic. Thankfully, they could heal when they underwent the joyous process of birthing during the second pregnancy.

Soon after the ladies on the dias shared their experiences, women from the audience started to share their experiences. Sushmita (name changed), a gynaecologist from Andhra Pradesh approximately in her 40's shared how her elder son has been still suffering due to mishandling by the doctors.

“As a student of medicine back then when I went for the delivery with dilatation in a big corporate hospital chain in Bangalore, the female doctor was in a hurry to attend a religious ceremony,” Sushmita said. The doctor started abusing Sushmita. She even used a vacuum to get the baby out faster which slipped and created clots in the baby’s head leading to Hyperbilirubinemia affecting the baby for a lifetime. It is almost 20 years now and Shushma has still not been able to get over the trauma.

It has been observed by the experts that a lot of women in India face such traumatic series of events during birthing, especially in government hospitals. Speaking during the conference, Dr Evita Fernandez, an obstetrician and chairperson of the Fernandez Foundation said that having safe and respectable birthing experience is the right of every woman.

“Empowering women with knowledge and giving them a voice in their birthing experiences is the cornerstone of safer and more positive childbirth,” said Dr Evita. The experiences of women shared in the conference according to her are actually lessons for doctors from her fraternity to know how their words and actions impact women.

The event was attended by 270 delegates including various birthing workers from foreign countries and almost 100 obstetricians from different hospitals in the country. Doctors working in government hospitals in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh also took part in the conference.

‘Having safe birthing right of every women’

Having safe and respectable birthing experience is the right of every woman. Empowering women with knowledge and giving them a voice in their birthing experiences is the cornerstone of safer and more positive childbirth, says Dr Evita

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