

Postpartum experiences of first-time fathers in a Tanzanian suburb: A qualitative interview study

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Objectives

to explore postpartum experiences of first-time fathers in a multicultural, low-income, suburban Tanzanian setting.

Design, setting and participants

individual qualitative interviews with ten first-time fathers, four to ten weeks post partum in Ilala suburb, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

Findings

these first-time fathers enjoyed fatherhood and revealed a sincere concern for the well-being of the mother and infant during the postpartum period. They described themselves as active in mother and infant care and household chores; however, they were limited by breadwinning responsibilities. The families were supported by relatives or laypersons. The mothers' and infants' nutrition had high priority but poverty was an obstacle. Timing of resumption of sex after childbirth was problematic as traditions prescribed abstinence while the woman is breast feeding. The risk of contracting HIV to the family was a concern. Reproductive and child health care often excluded fathers and gave unclear information.

Conclusion

these new fathers struggled to gain confidence and experience while engaging in family matters during post partum. Changing gender roles in the suburban Tanzanian society in general and their personal experiences of transition to fatherhood both facilitated and made the postpartum

period problematic. The health sector does not respond with respect to fathers' concerns for family health and needs for support.

Recommendations

these findings call for programmes on gender relations, which are supporting constructive masculinities and facilitate new fathers' active participation and responsibilities in parenting, family health and their relations with their partners. Such programmes should not only target people in childbearing age but also their potential support persons. Health workers should welcome fathers and discuss strategies for good family health during post partum. Counselling couples together could facilitate their support for each other in optimising health post partum.