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The fathers' perceptions of intimacy in the marital relationship after the birth of the first child.

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Abstract

The transition to parenthood has been noted to be a significant milestone in an individual's life that can have varying effects on the marital relationship. The marital relationship has further been noted to have implications on father involvement with children, where such involvement allows for better health and well being of the child. Sexual intimacy has been noted to be a significant aspect of a marital relationship that has an impact on marital satisfaction. As such the aim of this study was to explore father's experience and understanding of fatherhood as well as their perceptions of the marital relationship post birth of the first child. The marital relationship was explored through understanding how the birth experience and presence of the baby influence fathers' perceptions of their wife's desirability's, of marital intimacy and how sexual intimacy fits into the relationship post birth of the baby. The study consisted of a qualitative design and eight fathers were interviewed using a semi structured interview schedule. The data was then analysed using thematic content analysis. Findings suggested that whilst fathers reported a distinct decline in sexual intimacy there was no decline in marital satisfaction. Decline in marital satisfaction may have been buffered against, as fathers seemed to prepare for the birth of their child and held realistic expectations of the adjustments that would be required post birth of the baby. In addition, their view of intimacy had broadened to include sensuality where spending alone time with their wife and communication were seen as equally significant to sexual intimacy. The results from the study further indicated that fathers are becoming more involved in their parental role. In this regard fathers tended to create an individual space between them and their baby. This finding is in direct contrast to psychodynamic theories which discuss the father as involved in a triadic relationship with his child and hence relating only through the mother.