

The body well-being and fertility trade-off. How childbirth experience affects fertility trajectories

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This study pioneers the exploration of trauma induced by experiences during childbirth on fertility choices after the first birth. It aligns with the growing focus on the relationship between well-being and demography, emphasizing the body and fertility trade-off.

Using data from a 2023-2024 survey of 2,000 Italian mothers aged 25 to 45, we investigate how traumatic first childbirth experiences are linked to women's transition to the second child and their fertility intentions. We also study the connection between trauma and experiences during childbirth in the realm of body mistreatment.

Traumatic deliveries, whether vaginal, planned, or emergency caesarean sections, are associated with reduced or delayed fertility, as observed in subsequent births and fertility intentions. Some experiences before, during, and immediately after delivery (e.g., immobilization or lack of measures for the reduction of pain) are strongly associated with the perception of childbirth as traumatic. The trauma due to body experiences reduces fertility intentions.

These findings underscore the critical need to consider the childbirth experience, particularly trauma and body-related factors, as a central determinant in fertility and demographic studies.

Additionally, we highlight practical implications for healthcare policies, advocating for the development of healthcare environments that prioritize mothers' well-being.