

Pregnancy fears can lead to extreme reactions in some women

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Fear of pregnancy can lead to some women taking extreme measures to avoid pregnancy according to new research.

Helen Stephens from the University of the West of England has just completed a study exploring women's views on [pregnancy](#) and childbirth.

Helen's study supports previous research into the fear of childbirth, known as tokophobia. Helen explains that a fear of childbirth exists on a spectrum, in that most [women](#) will have some concern or apprehension regarding childbirth, but some women are so fearful that they feel unable to have children because of this fear, despite the fact that they might desperately want to have children.

However, Helen's study may be the first study of its kind, as it adds to previous research by suggesting that some women may experience a fear of pregnancy, as well as, or separate to, a fear of childbirth.

Women who reported being fearful of pregnancy were unable to explain specifically what it was that they were afraid of, other than a strong feeling that pregnancy is extremely unnatural. One woman described it as “like an alien bursting out” and another “like having a parasite growing inside”. Conversely, when talking about fears of childbirth women were able to identify specific features of their fear: the pain, it being undignified, short and longer term damage and their own ability to cope.

Several of the women described feeling physical symptoms of [anxiety](#) when thinking about being pregnancy or going through childbirth, or even hearing stories or seeing images. For example, one woman explained “I feel queasy, I get actual physical symptoms, such as fast heart beat, nausea, sweaty palms, I get totally stressed out and have nightmares.”

For some women who were interviewed in Helen's study, their fear was so extreme that they had discussed and researched options such as sterilisation, termination and adoption, as a way of avoiding pregnancy and childbirth, even though most women wanted to have a family of their own. A further example is of a woman who felt able to cope with pregnancy but was extremely fearful of [childbirth](#) and felt that the only way she could have her own children was via a caesarean section. Aware that she might not be granted this on the NHS she saved £25,000 so that she could afford to pay for this procedure privately if she had to. Luckily she was granted a caesarean section and now has the family she so badly wanted. However, another woman interviewed in a similar situation was not as fortunate and was refused a caesarean section by the NHS since her fear was not deemed to constitute a medical reason. She was extremely upset and frustrated by this; she and her partner are now considering [adoption](#).

Helen states that “an important finding was that these women feel like they are on their own, that other people do not understand. All of these women felt unable to talk about their views around pregnancy and [childbirth](#) because of a concern of how others would react. As a result most of the women now keep their feelings to themselves. Further research is need into both tokophobia and [fear](#) of [pregnancy](#), and into the support available for women with these fears.”

Provided by University of the West of England

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