

Early guidance can help future moms fight fear of childbirth

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Caesarean deliveries in most developed countries, including Canada, are at least 10 to 20 per cent higher than recommended by the World Health Organization, and many efforts to decrease unnecessary C-sections have

failed. But a new University of British Columbia study suggests that providing women with early knowledge about pregnancy and childbirth could help reduce these numbers.

UBC researcher Kathrin Stoll studied young women from eight middle and [high-income countries](#) and found that at least 10 per cent would prefer to deliver via caesarean even when the procedure is medically unnecessary, largely out of fear. Eight out of 10 women surveyed cited worries about labour pain, and six out of 10 were anxious about perceived physical damage from labour and birth.

But having sufficient information on childbirth seemed to make a difference. Of the 2,043 women who were sufficiently comfortable in their birth knowledge, only nine per cent said they would prefer caesarean in a healthy pregnancy. Among the 1,346 women who lacked that confidence, the proportion rises significantly to 14 per cent.

"Reducing unnecessary caesareans is important because abdominal surgery is linked to a higher risk of complications for the mother and baby and higher healthcare costs compared to vaginal births," said Stoll, a postdoctoral fellow in the school of population and public health and the division of midwifery in UBC's faculty of medicine.

The study found that [young women](#) who preferred [caesarean delivery](#) had several knowledge gaps and misperceptions about childbirth that could be addressed through education.

"We should be providing women and men with information about childbirth early on, as early as elementary or secondary school, before their attitudes towards birth become too influenced by media dramatizations and other sources that aren't evidence-based," said Stoll.

The researcher cautions that more studies are needed to find out the best

way to deliver this education. In the next stage of her research, she will test a promising midwife-led [childbirth](#) education program, currently practiced in Germany, for primary school children in Canada.

The study, published recently in *Reproductive Health*, examined survey data from 3,616 childless [women](#) in Australia, Canada, Chile, England, Germany, Iceland, New Zealand and the United States. The average age of participants was 23 years old. The Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research and Curtin University in Australia provided funding.

More information: Preference for cesarean section in young nulligravid women in eight OECD countries and implications for reproductive health education, *Reproductive Health* (2017). [DOI: 10.1186/s12978-017-0354-x](#)

Provided by University of British Columbia

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