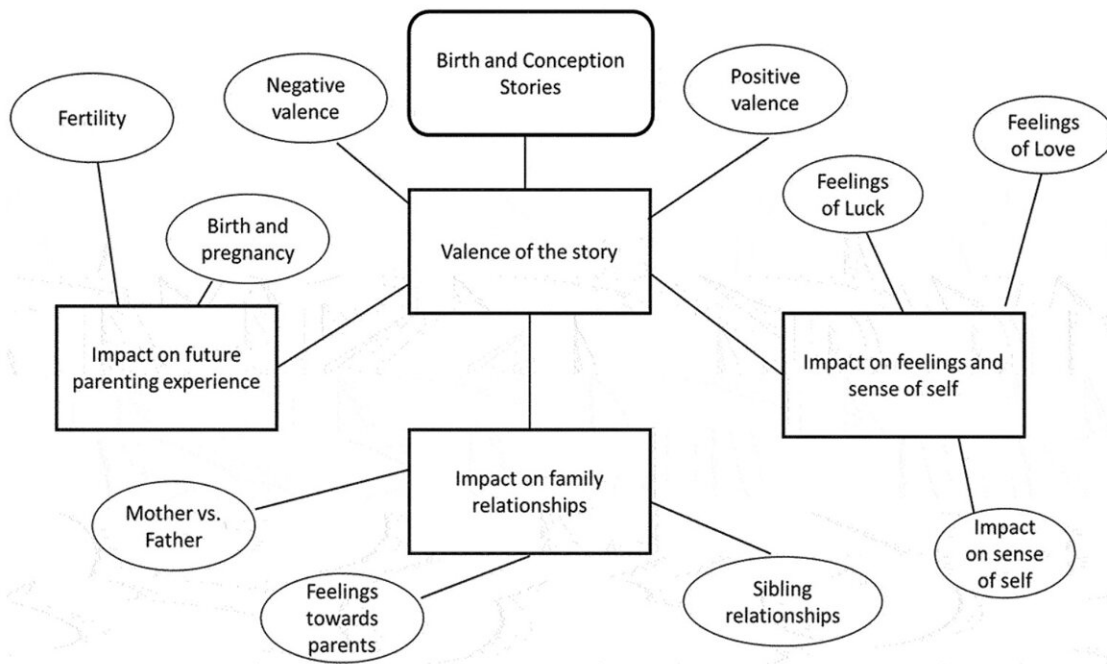


# Difficult birth stories can give people an appreciation for life

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Thematic map. Credit: *Cogent Psychology* (2022). DOI: 10.1080/23311908.2022.2105877

In the first study of its kind, researchers investigated the impact of stories around conception and birth and how they affect the individuals involved and their familial relationships. Previous research in this area has focused on the impact on the experience of difficult births and

conceptions but not on how they were communicated to the child/adult.

Jane Ogden, author of the study and professor of health psychology at the University of Surrey, said, "Many of us know our [birth story](#). However, for those whose [parents](#) had difficulty in conceiving them or whose mothers had a traumatic delivery, hearing those stories can shape their perceptions of both themselves and their parents as they grow to comprehend all the hardships and pain experienced to bring them into the world."

During the study, researchers interviewed participants about their conception and birth story. For many, understanding the difficulties that parents went through allowed participants to appreciate a new side of their parents, which enhanced the bond between them, particularly with their mothers. Those conceived via assisted conception also spoke about their love and gratitude towards their parents.

Some participants highlighted how stories about their difficult birth or conception may have had a detrimental impact on their siblings, who did not have the same experience, due to resentment, particularly if one sibling was seen to be preferred or to be the cause of stress in the family.

Interestingly, researchers also found that how stories were told rather than their content impacted how they were perceived. Stories which were told with humor and an upbeat tone were received more positively, whilst stories described with less [humor](#) and full of stress resulted in more [negative feelings](#) about their birth or [conception](#). Such stories sparked worry amongst participants about their ability to conceive and fear about their own future experiences when giving birth.

Professor Ogden added that "how a story is told is key to how it is received, as the feelings and emotions of the storyteller can be mirrored by the listener. A story told negatively can have a lasting impact on the

listener as it makes them think about their circumstances and can cause worry that the same thing could happen to them. It is important that people think before they speak and recognize the impact of their words."

This study was published in the journal *Cogent Psychology*.

**More information:** Jane Ogden et al, Making sense of the stories we are told about our own conception and birth: a qualitative analysis, *Cogent Psychology* (2022). [DOI: 10.1080/23311908.2022.2105877](https://doi.org/10.1080/23311908.2022.2105877)

Provided by University of Surrey

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