

# Psychological factors associated with women's birth experience in the Czech prison system

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**Background:** There is compelling evidence that women who are pregnant or have their babies while serving a prison sentence have significant mental health concerns. However, despite recent suggestions that pregnant women or birthing mothers should not be in a custodial environment, little is known about the birth experience of women under custodial circumstances.

**Objective:** The investigation sought to address this vacuum in the evidence by appraisal of the birth experience of this population.

**Method:** A small questionnaire-based study was conducted in the Czech Republic in a major women's prison. Czech-language versions of the Birth Satisfaction Scale-Revised (BSS-R), the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) were completed by women using pencil and paper data collection. The summary data was compared to normative data from the non-custodial maternal population within the Czech Republic.

**Participants:** Fifty-eight women consented to take part in the study of which fifty-five (95%) completed all BSS-R items, thus the dataset for analysis was based on this sample (N=55). The mean age (years) of participants was 32.11 (SD 5.62, range 22-47). The majority of participants were multiparous (N=48, 89%). The mean length of gestation was 37.65 (SD 3.46) weeks. The majority of participants had an unassisted vaginal delivery (N=25, 45%), while 13 (24%) had an assisted vaginal delivery, 6 (11%) a planned Caesarean section (CS) and 11 (20%) an emergency CS. The mean number of months since birth of the last baby was 39.87 (SD 21.65). The mean length (months) of prison sentence was 40.65 (SD 28.36, range 5-180). A range of index offences were represented by the participant group ranging from theft and fraud to murder.

**Results:** Women reported a significantly better birth experience than the non-custodial normal population despite relatively high depression and low self-esteem ratings.

**Conclusions:** Birth experience, as assessed by the BSS-R, reported by women in the Czech prison system is overall better than women in the general population. Given that this observation is contextualised within the context of relatively highly levels of depression (overall EPDS scores and screen cut-offs) and low levels of self-esteem (RSES), the notion that birth experience is preserved and encapsulated within this population raises important questions for both perinatal mental health and custodial policy.

