

Women's Perspectives and Experiences of Water Birth in Erbil City: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

Background and Objectives: Water birth is a pain-reducing and comfort-enhancing way of childbirth for women. Despite its origins in ancient methods, it has lately achieved global prominence, notably in midwifery-led care. However, acceptability and impression vary by area. This study aimed to explore women's perspectives and experiences regarding water birth in Erbil City.

Methods: A qualitative study was conducted at Private Hospital Shar in Erbil, Iraq, from January to February 2025. Semi-structured video call interviews were conducted with seven Kurdish-speaking mothers who had given birth using water. A purposive sampling strategy was employed, and data saturation was obtained. The interviews were transcribed, translated from Kurdish to English, and evaluated using content analysis. The study's rigor was maintained by ensuring its credibility, reliability, and confirmability.

Result: Psychological effects, cultural perspectives, and overall experience were the three major themes that emerged from the investigation. Pain relief, a sense of peace, and stress management were among the psychological effects. Cultural perspectives reflected the community's beliefs and norms. The overall experience included emotional relief, barriers and challenges, and willingness to recommend water birth to others. The participants' experiences may be fully understood by researching these themes.

Conclusion: Water birth was associated with reduced pain and improved psychological comfort. Despite cultural concerns and practical challenges, participants reported positive experiences and a willingness to repeat water birth. This study emphasizes informed choice, partner support, and adequate facility protocols to ensure safe implementation across diverse settings.

Keywords: Women's perspective; Water birth; Maternal health.

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INTRODUCTION

The term "water birth" (WB) refers to a method of giving birth in which the mother-to-be uses warm water to submerge her body, commonly her abdomen, during labor. Increased movement for mothers, less reliance on pharmaceutical pain relievers, and a stronger feeling of agency for laboring women are all outcomes of this approach [1]. Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians were among the first to embrace hydrotherapy, the therapeutic use of water during childbirth, to alleviate labor discomfort and facilitate relaxation. There is a growing desire to learn about the pros, cons, and safety considerations of WB for maternal and infant health as contemporary obstetric care advances. Over the last few decades, WB has gained popularity worldwide, particularly in regions that prioritize midwifery education and practice. In the 1960s, Russian physical therapist and midwife Igor Charkovsky sought to alleviate mother discomfort and discomfort during childbirth by introducing WB as a contemporary technique [2]. Further validation of water immersion as a way to limit medical interventions and promote mother happiness came later from Michel Odent's groundbreaking work in France [3]. Since then, WB has been standard practice in many hospitals across the country, and it has even been included in the national maternity policy in the United Kingdom (UK). Although WB is becoming more popular, it is still contentious in some areas. Concerning low-risk pregnancies, professional organizations in the US, such as the American College of Nurse-Midwives (ACNM) and American Association of Birth Centers (AABC), advocate for the practice, while the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) and American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) warn of neonatal risks like respiratory distress and infection during the second stage of labor. However,

the debate surrounding neonatal safety remains unresolved, with conflicting evidence in the literature; while some studies report favorable outcomes, concerns regarding potential neonatal complications such as respiratory distress and infection persist, highlighting the need for further context-specific research [4][5]. Safety worries, a lack of training, and inadequate institutional support have all contributed to the sluggish adoption rate in nations like Sweden and India [6][7]. The benefits of water birth have been well-documented in the literature and include less pain during labor, fewer episiotomies and cesarean sections, higher levels of maternal satisfaction, and a delivery that is more in harmony with the body's natural rhythms [8][9]. Furthermore, it seems that the body's natural hormonal reactions during labor are aided by submersion in water, which improves blood flow to the uterus and could help alleviate discomfort [7]. Despite this, the procedure poses several hazards. Issues with infant thermoregulation, infections, umbilical cord avulsion, and maternal hemorrhage or uterine rupture are potential consequences that should be closely monitored by skilled experts. This inconsistency in findings reflects an ongoing controversy regarding the balance between the benefits and potential risks of water birth across different clinical settings [10][11]. Water birth is increasingly incorporated into maternity care models in several countries as part of a shift toward less invasive and more patient-centered approaches. Evidence from countries such as the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and New Zealand shows that the integration of water birth, supported by clear policies and midwifery training, has been associated with improved maternal satisfaction, reduced need for pharmacological pain relief, and positive birth experiences [12][13].

However, effective implementation still depends on public health awareness, institutional support, and cultural acceptance. In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), particularly in Erbil City, WB remains a novel and underutilized method. Cultural conventions, a lack of professional training, and low levels of awareness all work together to prevent its widespread adoption. It is crucial to investigate women's awareness, perspectives, and experiences with WB in these settings because the practice is largely absent in standard maternal health care. Gaining insight into such perspectives aids in the detection of current obstacles and assists in the creation of context-sensitive plans to increase the variety of birthing alternatives in the area [14][15]. Objectives: This study aimed to explore the perspectives and experiences of women in Erbil City regarding water birth, including factors influencing their childbirth choices and the perceived advantages and disadvantages of this approach.

METHOD

Among the women who gave birth using water at Shar Private Hospital in Erbil City, Iraq, interviews were conducted during the postpartum period, with varying time intervals after delivery. The data collection did not take place immediately after birth or during hospital admission. A qualitative descriptive design was used to explore women's experiences, perceptions, and attitudes regarding water birth in Erbil City. The study was conducted at Shar Private Hospital in Erbil City, Iraq. Although CMC also provides water birth services, permission for participant recruitment was not granted; therefore, participants were recruited exclusively from Shar Private Hospital based on institutional access and ethical approval constraints. The study was conducted between January 21 and

February 21, 2025. Data collection and analysis were performed concurrently from January 21 to January 28, 2025, with each interview analyzed before proceeding to the next. Final data analysis was completed between February 1 and February 21, 2025. Data were collected through semi-structured video-call interviews lasting 25–45 minutes, guided by open-ended questions exploring experiences, expectations, motivations, and challenges related to water birth. Participants were identified and contacted through a midwife who was involved in water birth deliveries at the hospital. The researcher obtained participants' contact numbers with their consent and conducted the interviews individually using WhatsApp video calls, which was the primary communication application used for data collection. Mothers were included if they were willing to share their experiences and if they could speak and understand the Kurdish language well. All interviews were conducted in Kurdish, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English. To ensure linguistic accuracy, forward translation was performed and reviewed by a bilingual researcher to maintain consistency of meaning. Qualitative content analysis was used, resulting in three main themes (psychological effects, cultural perspectives, and overall experience) and seven subthemes. Ethical approval was obtained from the College of Nursing, Hawler Medical University. Verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection and documented by the researcher. Confidentiality was ensured, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. Trustworthiness was ensured through credibility, dependability, and confirmability strategies.

RESULTS

The qualitative content analysis of interviews with seven participants yielded three overarching themes (psychological effects, cultural perspective, and overall experience) and seven subthemes (pain relief, sense of peace, stress management, community beliefs, emotional relief, barriers and challenges, and recommending to others). These themes were derived from mothers' accounts of their experiences with water birth at Shar Private Hospital in Erbil City. Among these, psychological effects including pain relief, a sense of peace, and stress management were the most frequently reported experiences.

Theme 1: Psychological Effects

a) Pain Relief

Most participants described a noticeable reduction in labor pain while being in the water.

"On the positive side, I experienced less discomfort in the water, my muscles were relaxed, and the longer I remained in the water, the better I felt. One of the advantages I enjoyed was that I experienced significantly less pain and suffering while in the water, although my pain level rose when I emerged from the tub for the examination. I always wanted to be in the water and finish the examination as soon as possible, so I could go back in. To help me manage my discomfort, the midwife team would teach me breathing methods and massage my back while I was in the water. I think all these techniques may be quite successful" (Participant 4). "One advantage was that I experienced far less pain and suffering. My pain was greatly reduced by the water, and I felt completely at ease. While you anticipate experiencing excruciating pain during labor, I am sure the water eases the discomfort and makes it much more enjoyable. The warm water also softens your entire body and relaxes you" (Participant 1). "I gave birth to my first

child naturally, and I had severe pain, and I do not know exactly how to describe it to you. I felt like my bones might crack at any second. However, there was virtually little pain when I gave birth to my second child in water. I believe that the time I spent in labor and giving birth to my second child was quite brief. Between my labor and delivery, the entire procedure took between one and a half and two hours. Because of the water, my baby was born earlier. It was wonderful, warm water. I suffered a lot of discomfort with my first child, though. It was horrible, and I was in pain for about twelve hours. Only to inspect, I would get out of the tub, and the pain would start to worsen" (Participant 5). "All of it was good for me. Going into the water while in pain made me feel as though my pain had passed away. I received a message from the team, which was beneficial. There were, in my opinion, no drawbacks. It was excellent; there were no issues; it only lessened my discomfort. Every mother should give birth in water. The quality was excellent. There is a lot less tearing, the labor is shorter and more enjoyable, and there is very little pain due to water delivery, even though everyone fears natural childbirth and believes it would be deeply painful. I was not scared when the midwife instructed me to get in the water since I knew that the pain and suffering would decrease. The water will assist your baby's head going down and the uterus opening up, so you will not have to push continually, and you will not experience any pain or exhaustion. Giving birth in water was also a great idea because it greatly lessens discomfort" (Participant 6).

b) Sense of Peace

Many participants reported a strong feeling of peace, comfort, and emotional well-being during water birth. "Giving birth was relaxing, and I was comfortable. I felt relaxed and very comfortable. I was happy that the delivery ended happily. I was very

happy, and it made me feel relaxed. I went to the pool once or twice a week during pregnancy and labor, and that made me feel good about the water and made it easier. The water was very effective and good in improving labor" (Participant 1). "The longer in the water, the better the feeling became, and it seemed that labor was going to be much easier. There was a desire to be in the water all the time. It did not feel good when told to come out for the check-up. The warm water on the stomach felt like being covered with a warm blanket, which created relaxation and reduced stress" (Participant 4). "Before going to see the midwife at the hospital, walking for two hours and sitting in a tub of warm water helped. A good feeling was associated with the water, and it was known that sitting in the bathtub in the hospital could bring relaxation and support labor" (Participant 5). "Upon entering the hot water, rest and calmness increased, pain decreased significantly, and there was a strong desire to remain in the water. It felt nice, and there was a sense that the uterus opened and labor became easier. It was very relaxing, and the best part was being in warm water; stress was reduced, and there was happiness about giving birth in water. Water birth felt like the best phase of life. While preparing to go to the hospital, there was great happiness and a wish to return to the hot water so pain could decrease, with awareness that hot water was effective in pain relief" (Participant 7).

c) Stress Management Stress reduction during labor was described as a combined effect of immersion in warm water and continuous emotional support from the midwife team and partners. Initial anxiety and fear were common at the beginning of labor, particularly due to unfamiliarity with the method; however, these feelings gradually decreased after entering the water and receiving reassurance and guidance.

Emotional presence, physical support, and clear communication from caregivers played a key role in improving confidence and reducing tension. In contrast, a few accounts reflected minimal anxiety from the outset, mainly linked to prior knowledge and preparation, indicating variation in psychological responses among participants. "I was anxious at first, but as I got in the water, my anxiety subsided. I was so scared when I first arrived at the hospital that I even ordered the doctor not to touch me. However, the midwife and her team's feedback helped me to relax, and the hot tub also helped me to feel less stressed. Despite how anxious I was, I can honestly say that my delivery was quite easy and simple. To be honest, I did some research online on water birth and its advantages, how much it eases pain, and how much better it makes women feel. I heard and observed that it lessens the pain of labor, which was something I always thought about during my pregnancy. I had massages and exercises from the midwife team, who also supported me and held my hand. They even invited my partner to come and take my hands" (Participant 7). "I did not feel anxious. I had already read about water birth online. I was not afraid for the baby or myself. The team of midwives was great; they were at my side always. They gave me massages, exercises, and breathing techniques to help me reduce my pain and stress. The water was pleasant and warm. The stress was lessened by the warm sensation. I always liked being in the water because it helped me relax" (Participant 3). "At first, I was a little worried because it was new to me and something unknown, but water helped reduce my stress. I saw water birth from the Instagram page of a midwife who performs water birth in Hawler, and went to her, and she informed me of

the advantages of water birth and that I could select this delivery style. Throughout the birth, the midwife team held my hand and supported me as they gave me advice on what to do and what not to do. The midwife team and my husband were there for me when I needed them. In addition, the midwife told my husband to come to the delivery room and talk to me to reduce my stress. My wife was present during the delivery" (Participant 2). Theme 2: Cultural Perspective Regarding cultural beliefs, the majority of participants expressed that water delivery is still seen as new, unusual, or even weird in their society. Many choose not to inform others about their decision in order to prevent themselves from feedback or judgment.

"At first, I was a little scared, and it felt strange to me about the decision I made. To be honest, I chose a natural birth so that I would not have to have a cesarean section and live with scars and stitches on my body for the rest of my life. I had seen water births on Instagram that are done in other countries, and I had also heard that they reduce pain and discomfort. I spent my pregnancy researching it constantly, gathering information, and meeting with a midwife in Hawler who does water deliveries. In addition, she gave me lots of information, spoke with me, and explained the advantages of water births, adding that you have the option to use this method of childbirth. Water births are bad, according to a lot of people, and some individuals stated this new type was strange. I was determined to keep to my word and my decision against the opinions of others, and I am happy that I finally made the correct choice" (Participant 2). "To be honest, I did not tell anyone that I chose a water birth. I did not even tell my mother. Because in our community, these things are still strange, and people talk a lot about what

this is, how can you give birth in water, what is the new trend that a baby is born in water, maybe he suffocates. I hid everything and did not want their negative comments to affect me, so I did not tell anyone before I had the baby until the birth. Even my husband was surprised when I first told him and said, 'Can't a baby be born in water too?' But in the end, he said, 'We will choose whatever method is good for you and reduces your pain'" (Participant 7).

Theme 3: Overall Experience a) Emotional Relief Overall experiences were largely described in terms of relief from pain, increased comfort, and emotional satisfaction. Participants frequently linked their satisfaction to reduced discomfort, shorter labor duration, and a sense of ease during the birthing process. An encouraging note is that everyone who gave birth in a water birth reported feeling satisfied overall. A 23-year-old mother said: "It was a mostly positive aspect. Overall, it went well; I had less pain and discomfort and felt relaxed. My labor time was shorter, and the water was very effective in getting the baby out easily. I was satisfied and had a positive experience overall" (Participant 1).

Another mother shared: "The effect of the hot water was to speed up the labor process. It was my first experience, but it was a good one. When I saw that my pain and suffering had decreased, I felt much better, and my baby was healthy, I was very happy. I knew that the hot water would shorten my labor and pain because I had read a lot about it, and I knew it. After two days of pain and my cervix not opening, the hot water helped me to give birth quickly, and when they told me the baby was on the way, I was happy. It gave me strength and made me happy" (Participant 2).

As another mother expressed: "I wanted to be in the water the whole time because I felt like my pain was much less. Thank God it was a good experience, much better

than when I gave birth to my first child. Now I am so glad I chose water birth, and I do not regret it at all” (Participant 4).

b) Barriers and Challenges Although overall experiences were largely positive, only a limited number of participants reported practical or situational challenges. Most statements reflected an absence of difficulties, while actual barriers were mainly related to procedures performed outside the water or environmental discomfort rather than the water birth itself. Although most participants were satisfied with their water birth, a few raised minor challenges. A 21-year-old mother said: “I had no problems and have no complaints about the water birth. It was one of the best experiences of my life and had no negative aspects, and I do not regret my choice” (Participant 7). A 25-year-old mother stated: “There were no challenges or problems; it just reduced my pain, and it was very good. It was a more positive aspect than negative. I felt very good and satisfied overall. I had no fear or stress” (Participant 6). In the words of another mother: “The positive side was that I felt less pain when I was in the water; the water was warm, and my muscles were relaxed. The longer I stayed in the water, the better I felt. But the negative side was that when I got out of the bathtub for the examination, I had to dry myself, and I got cold. I had to lie on a bed, and they examined me. It was very uncomfortable for me, and I was in pain. It was very bad when they examined me, and I liked to be in the water all the time because it reduced my pain a lot. Also, I had a catheter; in the water, the adhesive would get wet and come loose, and they changed the adhesive twice for me, but my catheter did not come out, and it was in its place” (Participant 4). Another mother shared: “One of the positive aspects that was very interesting to me was: when

I went into the hot tub, my pain was much, much less, and dilation happened faster. But I think there was a negative aspect, which was that when I was close to giving birth, I could not get out of the tub to go to the toilet, and sometimes I had to urinate in the tub, and the water would get dirty. The tub was generally clean and tidy; they were disinfecting it, so I disinfected it myself and then went into the water. But when the water got dirty, I did not feel good” (Participant 3). c) Recommending to Others All mothers expressed satisfaction with their birth choice and recommended water birth to others. The second mother participant says: “Without a doubt! I would choose a water birth again. I am sure other mothers can benefit from it. I recommend it to others and tell them to choose water birth because it makes your birth much easier, your baby will be born sooner, you will have less pain, and the midwife team will help you and be with you” (Participant 2). A 32-year-old mother stated: “It is definitely good, and others can also benefit because I gave birth in water; it was very good, and I recommend others to choose natural childbirth, especially water birth, and not to choose a cesarean section. If I get pregnant again and give birth, I will choose a water birth. I recommend others take exercise classes and courses early in their pregnancy to prepare their body, uterus, and muscles. I started exercising at 36 weeks, but I think I started too late. I had a lot of pain when my first child was born, but for my second child, when I exercised and sat in warm water, I felt more relaxed, and my pain decreased” (Participant 4). As another mother once shared: “I hope all mothers give birth in water. It would be great. Everyone is afraid of natural childbirth and thinks there is a lot of tearing, but in water, there is much less tearing, the labor is shorter, and you feel very little pain. A few people

wrote to me and asked my opinion on water birth. I suggested that they go back to the midwife who delivered my baby and

use her. Yes, if I were to get pregnant again, I would choose water birth again” (Participant 6).

Table 1. Main themes and sub-themes

Themes	Subthemes
Psychological Effects	a) Pain relief b) Sense of peace c) Stress management
Cultural Perspective	Community belief
Overall Experience	a) Emotional relief b) Barriers and challenges c) Recommending to others

Table 2. Socio demographic characteristics of the participants

Participant	Age	Residence area	Religion	Education level	Occupation
P1	23	Urban	Muslim	University	Employed
P2	25	Urban	Muslim	Diploma	Housewife
P3	25	Urban	Muslim	University	Housewife
P4	32	Urban	Muslim	University	Employed
P5	30	Urban	Muslim	University	Employed
P6	25	Urban	Muslim	University	Housewife
P7	21	Urban	Muslim	Diploma	Housewife

Table 3. Obstetrical history of the participants

Participant	Gravida	Para	Abortion	Birth experience
P1	1	1	0	Water birth
P2	1	1	0	Water birth
P3	1	1	0	Water birth
P4	2	2	0	NVD/Water birth
P5	2	2	0	NVD/Water birth
P6	1	1	0	Water birth
P7	1	1	0	Water birth

Table 4. Abbreviations

Abbreviations	Full Term
WB	Water Birth
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
ACOG	American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
AAP	American Academy of Pediatrics
ACNM	American College of Nurse-Midwives
AABC	American Association of Birth Centers
HMU	Hawler Medical University

DISCUSSION

The psychological effects, cultural perspectives, and overall outcome of water births were the primary focus of this qualitative research on Kurdish women's experiences. The major research technique in this study was content analysis, which helped to identify important themes that define the complicated details of these women's perspectives and experiences. We go into further depth on the main points below. Psychological Effects Pain Relief For most participants, the pain of childbirth was significantly reduced following immersion in warm water. Many people found that floating on water and the subsequent decrease in body pressure helped them relax and cope better with discomfort. This is in line with research that highlights submersion in water as an effective technique for decreasing labor pain [16]. Example: The experience was described as "relaxation" and "less discomfort." Consistent with previous research highlighting the therapeutic effects of water immersion in alleviating labor pain, participants reported that warm water facilitated muscle relaxation, thereby reducing overall discomfort [17]. An observant participant noted the differences between water births and conventional land births. The stark difference in the intensity of the pain felt between water delivery and a conventional land birth was brought to light by one participant who had gone through both kinds of deliveries: "virtually no pain" during the former and "severe pain" during the latter. Research has shown that giving birth in water can lessen the severity of labor pain and possibly shorten the duration of labor as a whole [18]. This finding is in line with those findings. Water births were also linked to a better delivery experience and less need for analgesia, according to Smith et al. [19]. Sense of Peace In addition to reducing

pain, several women who gave birth while submerged in water reported feeling an overwhelming sensation of calm and relaxation. The relaxing effect of the water on the body and mind, described by one participant as like a warm blanket, helped create a general sense of tranquility. Previous research has shown that being submerged in water creates a calm atmosphere that is ideal for giving birth, which may explain why they felt so much better emotionally throughout labor [20]. Several individuals spoke about how the water's calming effects helped them "relax" and feel better generally. The description of water birth as "the best part of my life" reflected a profound sense of contentment and joy, which was similarly expressed by several participants, indicating its positive emotional impact. Additionally, research has shown that giving birth in water helps women feel more relaxed and less anxious throughout labor, according to studies conducted by Snapp et al. and Sidebottom et al. [21][22]. Improved mother outcomes and overall happiness with the delivery experience have been associated with relaxation during labor, especially when it comes to submerging oneself in water [20]. Stress Management Additionally, several women found that submerging themselves in water helped them manage labor-related stress. For instance, as a demonstration of the immediate calming impact of water, participant 7 mentioned feeling "very anxious" before entering the water, but her tension "subsided" as she was submerged. The results support those of Kavosi et al., who discovered that submersion in water during childbirth alleviates tension and anxiety [23]. Partners' and midwives' emotional support was also mentioned as a factor that helped participants feel more secure and less stressed. Two of the participants emphasized the importance of a supportive delivery

environment that offers both physical and emotional care from the birthing team. The participant described labor that was free of pain thanks to the midwives' instructions and the relaxing benefits of water. Massages and breathing exercises were also available to help relax the mother and family throughout birth, which was a huge relief for everyone involved [17]. These results are in line with the consensus that safe and nurturing settings are essential for good outcomes for both mothers and their newborns [20]. Cultural Perspective Water birth has received mostly positive views; however, it remains controversial in many cultures, particularly in Kurdistan. Cultural beliefs strongly shape women's perceptions, as childbirth is generally viewed as a medical process that should take place in hospital settings. Within this framework, water birth may be associated with uncertainty and perceived risks, especially regarding neonatal safety (Participant 7). Social expectations and traditional values that favor familiar medical practices also contribute to cautious attitudes toward its acceptance. As a result, communities often view water birth with suspicion due to its unfamiliar nature, particularly because of concerns about infant safety, such as the risk of asphyxia. Participants' responses indicated that such perceptions reflect broader social opposition to alternative birthing methods. This situation is consistent with a general preference for hospital-based delivery, including cesarean section when needed, which reinforces mistrust toward less conventional practices [18]. The importance of human agency in birthing decisions is shown by the fact that some participants in this study were determined to have a water delivery despite social disapproval. The importance of making well-informed decisions, even when faced with societal pressures, was highlighted by one participant who said she consulted

healthcare experts and conducted thorough research before making her decision. This study also confirmed the growing influence of internet platforms and social media on public views about water birth. Reading up on water birth in books and talking to others who have gone through it helped a lot of people who took the survey. It appears that even in regions where water birth is not often done, having access to information online may greatly impact how people see and accept alternative birth options [24]. Overall Experience Emotional Relief The overall experience of water birth, according to the participants in this study, was overwhelmingly positive. Many women highlighted the reduction in pain, faster labor, and the overall emotional satisfaction with the experience. These findings are consistent with previous research that emphasizes the benefits of water immersion, such as fewer episiotomies, less need for pain medications, and quicker labor times [16][20]. As one participant stated, water birth allowed her to experience "virtually no pain," a sentiment shared by many others. The calming effect of the water, combined with the reduced pain, resulted in a more satisfying and less stressful birth experience. In addition to these benefits, many participants expressed a desire to choose water birth again for future pregnancies, underscoring the favorable emotional experience and positive physical outcomes. These women also recommended water birth to others, noting the improved control over the birthing process and the heightened sense of comfort it provided compared to traditional methods [17]. Barriers and Challenges Although the majority of mothers reported positive experiences with water birth, some challenges and clinical considerations were also identified. From a medical perspective, water birth requires continuous monitoring to ensure maternal and

neonatal safety, and potential risks such as infection control, temperature regulation, and equipment management should be carefully considered in clinical practice. Participants did mention a few difficulties, despite the generally good feedback. Some participants identified difficulty exiting the warm water for postpartum assessment as a concern. The chilly sensation reported after getting out of the tub was a noticeable interruption to what was otherwise a relaxing experience. The change from warm water to a colder environment may induce physical discomfort and interrupt the continuity of ease and relaxation developed throughout labor, which is a larger issue with water birth techniques. Also, when it came time for individuals to perform biological functions like urinating while laboring, several were worried about the quality of the water. More effective methods of regulating hygiene and guaranteeing comfort during water deliveries are necessary in light of this [25]. Water delivery also presents the additional problem of managing medical equipment, especially catheters. The adhesive on the catheter became moist and required frequent adjustments. Further improvements in water birth techniques are needed to address this practical challenge and guarantee the security and effectiveness of medical equipment when women are submerged in water [17].

Recommending to Others Despite the challenges, everyone who gave birth by water was satisfied with the experience and wanted to tell others about it. When compared to conventional methods of delivery, many mothers found that giving birth in water was easier and more comfortable. To maximize the advantages of water immersion during delivery, one participant suggested that pregnant women participate in exercise classes and programs early on in their pregnancies. This guidance highlights the significance of

comprehensive water birth preparation, which includes not only physical fitness but also the emotional support of partners and midwives [18].

Limitations of the Study This study had several limitations. First, access to data collection was restricted to only one private hospital in Erbil (Shar Hospital) that provided water birth services, while another private hospital (CMC) did not allow data collection. This limitation reduced the sample size and the diversity of participant experiences. Second, some women declined face-to-face interviews due to privacy concerns, which necessitated the use of video-call interviews. Although this enabled data collection to proceed, it may have affected the depth of qualitative interaction. Finally, several supportive care factors, including continuous midwifery support, effective communication, partner presence, and non-pharmacological interventions such as back massage during labor, were not controlled. These factors may have influenced maternal satisfaction and birth outcomes, making it difficult to attribute the findings solely to water birth.

CONCLUSION

Evidence from this study shows that submersion in water during delivery has several positive effects, such as pain relief, emotional calmness, and reduced stress. A majority of participants reported favorable experiences and expressed willingness to choose water birth again, despite existing skepticism and practical barriers. These findings highlight the importance of informed choice, partner support, and access to reliable information in shaping women's childbirth experiences. Furthermore, addressing current barriers and improving clinical protocols may encourage wider acceptance of water birth in culturally diverse settings. Future research is recommended to strengthen the evidence

base and guide the safe implementation of this approach in healthcare facilities.

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