

EXPLORATORY STUDY OF Childbearing Experiences OF WOMEN WITH Asperger Syndrome

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Asperger syndrome, an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), emerged in the diagnostic and lay vernaculars in a significant way in the 1990s, when the condition was explicitly defined in the American Psychiatric Association's fourth edition (1994, and subsequent revisions) of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)*. Since that decade, increasing numbers of individuals and especially increasing numbers of girls have been diagnosed with Asperger syndrome and other ASDs. The reasons for such increases are not completely understood but likely include increased awareness of and improved diagnostic approaches to these conditions, in addition to other as yet undetermined factors (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2012; Giarelli et al., 2010). An increasing population of women with Asperger syndrome will enter the childbearing and child-rearing phases of their lives; this will require maternal-child clinicians and researchers to align models of perinatal care with the needs of this group of women. In the past, health care providers probably cared for women with Asperger syndrome or similar ASDs but were unaware of the women's conditions.

Abstract: Increasing numbers of girls have been diagnosed with Asperger syndrome and other autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) over the past two decades; therefore, more women with ASDs are entering the childbearing phase of their lives. Little is known about the childbearing experiences of women with ASDs. This qualitative study describes the childbearing experiences of eight women with Asperger syndrome. Four major themes emerged: *Processing Sensations*, *Needing to Have Control*, *Walking in the Dark*, and *Motherhood on My Own Terms*. Clinicians can provide sensitive, individualized care by asking women with Asperger syndrome about their specific sensory experiences, counseling them about coping strategies for sensory intrusions, providing targeted support, and modifying the clinical environment to decrease distressing stimuli. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.nwh.2015.12.001>

Keywords: Asperger syndrome | autism | autism spectrum disorders | childbearing | pregnancy experience

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