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Lights, camera, push! Are British television programs influencing women's expectations of childbirth? A literature review

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Background: With a television at the center of almost every living room across the UK, TV watching hours is at an all-time high. With childbirth, the main feature of several recent programs, what women are seeing on television could be influencing their expectations around childbirth and informing their choices. This review aims to explore the current literature to examine exactly the influences achieved and their implications.

Method: A comprehensive search across a range of databases of the literature relating to childbirth on television and the influence it has on women.

Results: Three themes were identified: (1) Fear, (2) Medicalization of childbirth and (3) Autonomy of women. Within Fear, the subtheme: Performance anxiety was identified as well as older mothers within the theme medicalization of childbirth. The use of increased medicalization for dramatization to captivate audiences gives an inaccurate portrayal of childbirth, instilling unnecessary fear in the audience. However, women are not influenced exclusively by television and utilize many other social and cultural sources of information.

Conclusion: There is limited research around the effects of women being exposed to childbirth on television. From the literature, it is evident that television does influence women's expectations and decision-making around childbirth, although the extent to which is not examined within the literatures.

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