Is Elective Caesarean Section a Good Choice?

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Author Note

This paper was prepared for English 202, Section 01, taught by Instructor Kimberly Bunts-Anderson.

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Abstract

In recent years, caesarean section rates have been dramatically increasing. Although the matter is not openly discussed, many people would like to know the reasons for this rise in caesarean rates. The following report describes a project investigation that took place in Saipan for an English 202 summer class. The research focuses on whether having an elective caesarean is a good choice or not. Data collection was done through extensive literature review and surveys. This paper examines the personal reasons and experiences that women have about caesarean. Initial findings suggest that the issue of whether elective caesarean section is good or not will remain in debate for a long period of time since birthing methods depend on various situations.

**Introduction**

Childbirth methods have always been an important issue for the safety and well being of a mother and baby or babies. The two major methods include natural childbirth: the delivering of a baby through a woman’s vagina and caesarean section: the delivering of a baby by surgically cutting open a woman’s abdomen. Usually, the mother chooses the delivery method with the assistance of a medical professional; however, there are also cases when emergency operations are the only options. Although elective caesarean rates have been increasing over the years, not many people understand the reason behind the increase. The topic is quite interesting to the residents of Saipan due to the fact that elective caesarean is related to the island’s primary revenue: tourism. Due to time constraints, data collection was conducted through only two methods: extensive literature review and surveys. This research paper will consider whether elective caesarean is a good choice or not.

**Literature Review**

**Internet**

Data collection for the literature review began on July 10 when the student researcher searched for articles and studies that would help answer her research question: Is elective caesarean a good choice? The key words “caesarean section benefits” were entered in *Google.com* resulting with about 500,000 hits. Only one article that was written by Lowdon and Derrick from twelve years ago was selected. Though it is a bit dated, the online article provided some risks and benefits of both caesareans and natural birth. Lowdon and Derrick came upon the reason that caesareans “have become more popular” is because of the “wonders of modern technology” (2002, p. 1).

Another search was made in Google Scholar using the words “elective caesarean risks and benefits” where one study titled *Planned elective caesarean section: A reasonable choice for some women?* was picked out to use for the research paper. The study had been peer reviewed and cited by 80 people. Dr. Hannah focuses on “whether a planned caesarean delivery will be more beneficial than harmful” “compared with a planned vaginal birth” (2004, para. 8). Dr. Hannah’s topic is similar to the research question and further mentions some risks and benefits of caesarean sections.

Additionally, a search through *Google.com* with the key words “Saipan birth rates” resulted in about seven hundred thousand hits. Two more articles discussing the relation between caesarean operations and the islands of the CNMI was selected. These articles revealed similar issues regarding Saipan being the target for “anchor babies” (*Call for US...*, 2013, para. 2). A journalist from the Marianas Variety Newspaper whose been investigating the issue reports that the Governor of the Marianas Islands has been trying to stop pregnant Chinese women from entering the CNMI. These articles explain one of the reason why some women choose to have an elective caesarean.

**Book**

The required text needed for the research was acquired at Saipan’s Joeten Kiyu Public Library. Dr. Bruce Flamm’s book, *Birth after Cesarean,* provides the student researcher information such brief history, different types, and additional medical facts all on caesareans. Though the book is fairly outdated, it contains fascinating details of where and when the first caesarean was performed and how its name came about. For instance, there had been sayings that a Doctor performed a caesarean operation on his wife in the year 1794 but experts did not believe it (Flumm, 1990, p. 16). Therefore, the first documented c-section was executed by Dr. Richmond in the year 1827 (Flumm, 1990, p. 16).

**Methodology**

Research data collection was completed quite different from the previous plan because of time restraints. The researcher conducted an extensive literature review to collect the important data. Two blogs have been chosen to compare and contrast the experiences of four women instead of conducting interviews. The textbook, *Birth after Cesarean*, consists of many interesting facts that are relevant to the research question. One peer reviewed studies have been selected from *Google Scholar*, while two newspaper articles have been chosen after searching through *Google.com*. Because of quick access via the internet, most of the references used were found online. A survey (please see Appendix A) about caesarean was sent out to fellow classmates of an English summer class; however, only two were able to take it. Five surveys were handed to the researcher’s neighbors and all were completed. A total of seven surveys were collected and analyzed along with the articles found online.

**Analysis**

After all necessary data had been collected; the Researcher reviewed the available resources to identify differences and similarities that are relevant to the research question. People wonder if having an elective caesarean is a good choice or not. Because all women encounter dissimilar circumstances during pregnancy, there is no exact answer to the question. Two weblogs chosen for the research paper is provided to compare the personal experiences of women who have had caesareans. One of the blog talks about an elective c-section. In contrast, a separate blog discusses undergoing natural birth. An interesting article found by searching through *Google.com* provides information regarding the issues of caesareans in Saipan. A few surveys that were given out reveal personal experiences and opinions concerning caesareans and natural birth. According to Dr. Hannah, the rates of caesareans are increasing due to the “general perception” that better knowledge, more practices, and modern technology offers safer surgeries (2004, para.1). The rise in caesarean section rates does not surely mean that it is a good childbirth method. The data and facts gathered provide support in answering the following questions:

1. What is elective caesarean section and why do women choose to have it?
   * How is Saipan affected by the rise of caesarean rates?
2. What are the risks of caesarean childbirth?
3. What are the benefits of caesarean childbirth?
4. What are the different views of natural birth vs. caesarean?

**Findings**

**What is an elective caesarean section and why do women choose to have it?**

An elective caesarean section is a planned surgery that was scheduled in advance by maternal request to deliver a baby by cutting open a woman’s abdomen. The article by Lowdon and Derrick indicate many reasons why women choose to have planned caesareans even though there are no complications with the pregnancy. Three common reasons why women decide on having elective caesareans involve quick labours, pain-free operations, and following strict schedules. Owing to the fact that modern technology is gradually becoming part of many people’s lives, women feel less pressured when thinking about undergoing an important surgery (Lowdon & Derrick, 2002). The caesarean surgery requires the patient to be injected with anaesthesia so the operation is “perceived as pain-free,” which is a solution for those mothers who have agliophobia (Lowdon & Derrick, 2002). According to Lowdon and Derrick, some women like the idea being able to select the child’s birthday while others simply follow strict daily plans causing them to schedule their deliveries (2002, para. 9).

**How is Saipan affected by the rise of caesarean rates?** A journalist with Saipan’s Marianas Variety has been researching about anchor babies for more than one year since 2012. Tammy Doty, the journalist, has reported that pregnant Chinese women fly over to Saipan during their last trimester of pregnancy with “visa waivers” that allow Chinese people to stay in the CNMI for forty five days only in order for the child to acquire US citizenship(*Call for US...*, 2013, para. 8) . An article by David North who had been following the same issue on anchor babies claims that forty five days are more than enough for Chinese mothers to give birth, recover after delivery, and prepare the child’s new US passport then return to China (2013, para. 7). North also indicates that birthing packages range between $6,000-$8,000 not including food, housing, and transportation (2013, para. 8). Our economy is growing seeing that Chinese nationals pay so much just to give birth on Saipan or elsewhere in the CNMI, however, data (see Table 1) provided by North also shows that “more than one-third of the islands’ births last year were to Chinese women” (2013, para.3). The anchor babies issue is related to the topic because Chinese women most likely choose to have elective caesareans so that scheduled plans will be completed accordingly and to avoid wasting thousands of dollars.

Table 1

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Ethnicity | Total no. of Births |
| Chinese (mostly tourists) | 356 |
| Indigenous residents | 295 |
| Filipino residents | 216 |
| Koreans | 32 |
| Caucasian residents | 19 |
| All others | 86 |
| Total | **1,004** |

**What are the risks of caesarean childbirth?**

Dr. Hannah examines a study that conducted a trial in which women were randomly chosen to undergo a planned caesarean or a natural birth. The results of the trial comprise of a few risks of caesarean section: longer recovery time and increase risks of “major bleeding” from “placental abruption” (2004, para. 5). In accordance to the surveys (please see Appendix B) that were completed, 50% believe that it takes a woman 3-6 weeks to fully recover after undergoing a c-section and the other 50% believe it takes 7 or more weeks for recovery while five out of seven people talked about having experienced or knew someone who has experienced serious complications after having a caesarean surgery. Most of the complications had to deal with serious infections with the wound. In spite of the fact that more and more women are requesting for elective caesarean (Hannah, 2004, para. 1), it is not always the best childbirth or delivery method when there are too much risks involved.

**What are the benefits of caesarean childbirth?**

Aside from the risks, Dr. Hannah also states some of the benefits of caesareans after investigating the “international randomized Term Breech Trial involving 2,088 women” (2004, para. 1). There were various advantages discussed but the student researcher only mentions the most common ones. Such benefits include “avoidance of labour pains,” “reduced risks of urinary inconsistence, which is a common postpartum problem,” and “reduced worry about the health of the baby” (2004, para. 6). Regardless of the dramatic increase of caesarean rates, only 14.29% of surveyees from Saipan think that caesarean section is safer than natural birth (please see Appendix C).

**What are the different views of natural birth vs. caesarean?**

Two blogs have been compared and contrasted to see the different perspectives and experiences of natural vs. caesarean delivery. The first blog describes how Anna Latimer was extremely happy that she chose to have a caesarean operation. Latimer never had a birth plan simply because the thought of delivery through the vagina was terrifying, especially since Latimer had a “low pain threshold” (2013, para. 3). After the c-section surgery, Latimer reports about her personal experience, which seems to be positive. The surgery was absolutely painless; Latimer felt assured as there was many medical staff present in the operating room; recovery did not take more than 2-3 weeks; and finally, Latimer was able to hold her newborn baby within an hour of the surgery (2013, p. 1).

The second blog Suzanne Scholsberg talks about her personal experience of giving birth to twins: the first was delivered naturally while the second was delivered through a c-section because the baby was in danger of losing his air supply. If it was not for the emergency situation, Scholsberg would choose the natural childbirth method any day (2013, p. 1, para. 2). Scholsberg also mentions that “giving birth is like taking your lower lip and forcing it over your head” but that saying was way better than a stapled belly, catheters placed in the bladder, “intense gas pains,” long period of time for hospital stays and recoveries, and high risks of wound infections (2013, p. 1, para. 3). Everything that Scholsberg experienced is the compelte opposite of what Latimer had gone through. All women come across different situations during pregnancy so the childbirth method really depends on the mother and child’s condition before, during, and after delivery.

**Discussion**

Because of the time constraints, plans of collecting data had been changed multiple times. Surveys and interviews that targeted patients at the Saipan hospital were omitted due to the difficulty of getting approval from the CEO. Instead, the Survey of Childbirth Methods was displayed through *Google Docs* and was distributed to a couple of the student researcher’s neighbors. After gathering and analyzing the data, the initial findings suggest that elective caesarean is more commonly performed in the 21st century compared to the past. Because every single woman face different conditions when carrying a child, it is difficult to give a yes or no answer to the research question: Is elective caesarean a good choice? In most cases, the mother chooses the delivery method with the guidance of a medical professional; however, emergency situations do not usually offer women a choice other than surgery. Some studies argue that elective caesareans are safer than natural deliveries for the reason that risks of stillbirth and fatal heart rate abnormalities are reduced (Hannah, 2004, para. 6). On the other hand, other studies claim that while caesarean surgeries have a few advantages on the baby being born, it can also “trigger life threatening haemorrhage in the mother, either during or after giving birth” (Schlosberg, 2013, para. 10). The differences of pregnancies among all women have been stressed throughout the paper conveying that the research question cannot only have one exact answer.

**Conclusion**

Even with the short period of time, the research student was able to complete the paper on time. Most data collection methods were changed. For instance, surveys that were meant to be given out at the women’s clinic was cancelled and instead, distributed to relatives and friends. Data analysis took more time than expected especially since most information was accumulated from the internet. All five required references were met. Even though the research topic is a controversial matter, it was quite onerous to get the best information needed to answer the research question clearly. However, the research paper does contain facts, such as risks and benefits and personal experiences that could assist expecting mothers with choosing the right childbirth method for themselves and of course, the baby’s.

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Appendices

Appendix ATop of Form

Survey of Childbirth Methods

This is a brief survey regarding the two major forms of childbirth: *natural*, when a woman gives birth through the vagina and *caesarean*, when a woman's abdomen is medically cut open to deliver the baby. Thank you for taking time to answer this survey.

1. What is your

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| What is your   Age? |  |
| Gender? |  |
| Ethnicity? |  |

2. Have you given birth before or know anyone who has?

|  |
| --- |
| https://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gifHave you given birth before or know anyone who has?   Yes  https://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gifNo |

3. If yes, what childbirth method was used?

|  |
| --- |
| https://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gifIf yes, what childbirth method was used?   Natural  https://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gifCaesarean  https://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gifI'm not sure |

4. How long do you think it will take for most women to fully recover after undergoing natural birth?

|  |
| --- |
| https://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gifHow long do you think it will take for most women to fully recover after undergoing natural birth?   2 weeks or less  https://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gif3-6 weeks  https://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gif7 weeks or more |

5. How long do you think it will take for most women to fully recover after undergoing a caesarean?

|  |
| --- |
| https://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gifHow long do you think it will take for most women to fully recover after undergoing a caesarean?   2 weeks or less  https://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gif3-6 weeks  https://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gif7 weeks or more |

6. What do you think is a better/safer method?

|  |
| --- |
| https://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gifWhat do you think is a better/safer method?   Natural Childbirth  https://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gifCaesarean Childbirth  https://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gifI'm not sure |
| Please explain why. |

7. Do you know what an elective caesarean is?

|  |
| --- |
| https://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gifDo you know what an elective caesarean is?   Yes  https://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gifNo |
| If yes, please explain what it is. |

8. Do you think it is good to have a caesarean even though there aren't any complications with the pregnancy?

|  |
| --- |
| https://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gifDo you think it is good to have a caesarean even though there aren't any complications with the pregnancy?   Yes  https://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gifNo |
| Why? |

9. Have you experienced any complications with natural childbirth or know someone who has?

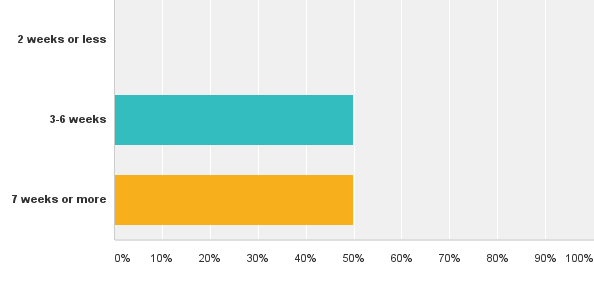
|  |
| --- |
| https://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gifHave you experienced any complications with natural childbirth or know someone who has?   Yes  https://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gifNo |
| If yes, please explain what happened. |

10. Have you experienced any complications with a caesarean or know someone who has?

|  |
| --- |
| https://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gifHave you experienced any complications with a caesarean or know someone who has?   Yes  https://www.surveymonkey.com/i/t.gifNo |
| If yes, please explain what happened. |

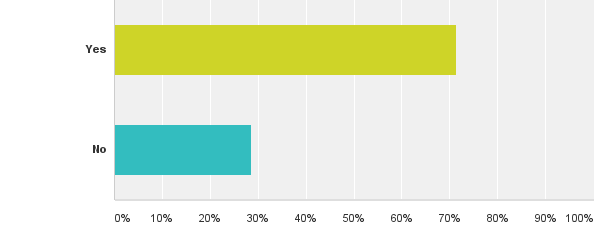
Appendix B

Results for Question 5 of Survey for Childbirth Methods

**How long do you think it will take for most women to fully recover after undergoing a caesarean?**

Results for Question 10 of Survey for Childbirth Methods

**Have you experienced any complications with a caesarean or know someone who has? Please explain.**

****



###### **Showing** 5 **responses**

Infection from the stitches

My sister in law developed severe wound infection after caesarean delivery

A relative was not able nurse her child comfortably for almost two weeks because she could not handle pain.

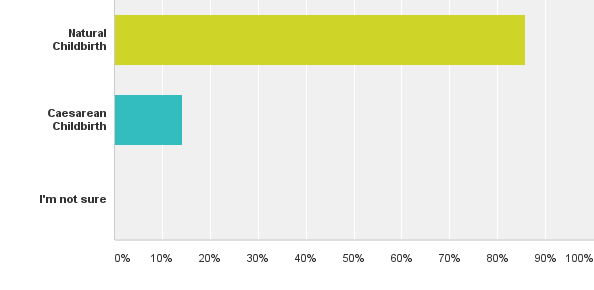
My mother who had it here at CHC...the doctor did a bad job in sewing her back up and they cut her the wrong way (Vertical). It was a dangerous recovery which left my mom bleeding for months and very sick, we had to take local medicines to make her better and recover successful.

My stomach muscles did not heal well after the surgery and I had to have another surgery to repair them later. There are still some issues as the after care of my original surgery was bad so it caused the opening not to heal well which has caused issues and will in the future. Such as causing back aches, less strength in abdomine , neck aches , need for chiropracter to move back etc. as the muscles are not there to do it.

Appendix C

Question 6 for Survey of Childbirth Methods

**What do you think is a better/safer method? Please explain why.**

****

###### **Showing** 5 **responses**

easier on a woman's body

less pain

No major surgery needed.

Because it's natural and the other is cutting up your body (stomach) and that's worse.

The body is built to go through and survive natural birth. Caesareans are major surgeries and take longer to heal.