

Effectiveness of Companionship Partner -Integrated Childbirth Preparation on Maternal and Paternal Psychological Outcomes, Neonatal Outcomes, and Childbirth Experience among First-Time Expectant Couples: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

Background:

Pregnancy and childbirth represent major life events that often generate psychological stress, anxiety, and fear among first-time expectant couples. Antenatal education programs that involve partners in childbirth preparation have been suggested to improve psychological wellbeing and childbirth experiences. However, the available evidence on the effectiveness of companionship-integrated childbirth preparation programs remains fragmented.

Objective:

This systematic review aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of companionship-integrated childbirth preparation on maternal and paternal psychological outcomes, neonatal outcomes, and childbirth experiences among first-time expectant couples.

Methods:

A systematic review was conducted following PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Electronic databases including PubMed, MEDLINE, Scopus, CINAHL, PsycINFO, and Embase were searched for studies published between 2000 and 2026. Randomized controlled trials, quasi-experimental studies, and comparative studies evaluating partner-integrated childbirth preparation interventions were included. Data extraction and quality assessment were conducted independently by two reviewers. PROSPERO (CRD420261282177).

Results:

Evidence from the included studies suggests that companionship-integrated childbirth preparation significantly reduces maternal anxiety, paternal stress, and fear of childbirth. Studies also reported improved childbirth satisfaction, stronger partner support, and better psychological adjustment among expectant couples. Some studies demonstrated improvements in neonatal outcomes, including better Apgar scores and reduced NICU admissions.

Conclusion:

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Companionship-integrated childbirth preparation programs are effective interventions for improving psychological wellbeing among expectant couples and enhancing childbirth experiences. Integrating partner-focused antenatal education into routine maternal healthcare services may improve maternal and neonatal outcomes.

Keywords: Companionship, antenatal education, childbirth preparation, psychological wellbeing, neonatal outcomes, expectant couples, Partner involvement, Perinatal mental health.

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INTRODUCTION

Pregnancy is a significant physiological and psychological transition characterized by complex biological, emotional, and social changes. Although often associated with positive anticipation, it can also lead to anxiety, fear, and psychological distress, particularly among primigravida women and their partners. Evidence suggests that pregnancy-related anxiety affects a substantial proportion of first-time mothers and is associated with adverse maternal and neonatal outcomes, including preterm birth, low birth weight, and postpartum depression.

Conventional antenatal care primarily focuses on the pregnant woman, with limited emphasis on partner involvement. However, emerging evidence highlights the critical role of partners in enhancing maternal emotional wellbeing and improving childbirth experiences. Companionship-integrated childbirth preparation programs actively involve partners in antenatal education, emotional support, stress management, and labor preparation, thereby strengthening couple support systems and promoting positive transition to parenthood. Partner participation has been associated with improved maternal coping during labor, reduced fear of childbirth, enhanced paternal confidence, and better psychological adjustment among couples. Additionally, supportive partner involvement has been linked to improved neonatal outcomes. Despite increasing interest in partner-integrated interventions, the existing evidence remains fragmented and heterogeneous. Therefore, this systematic review aims to synthesize the available evidence on the effectiveness of companionship-integrated childbirth preparation programs on maternal and paternal psychological outcomes, childbirth

experience, and neonatal outcomes among first-time expectant couples.

2. Objectives

1. To evaluate the effectiveness of companionship-integrated childbirth preparation on maternal psychological outcomes (anxiety, stress, fear of childbirth).
2. To assess the impact of these programs on paternal psychological outcomes.
3. To determine the influence of partner-integrated childbirth preparation on childbirth experiences.
4. To examine the effect of the intervention on neonatal outcomes.

3. Methods

Study Design

Only primary research studies were included; systematic reviews and meta-analyses were excluded.

Protocol Registration

The review protocol was registered in the PROSPERO database (CRD420261282177).

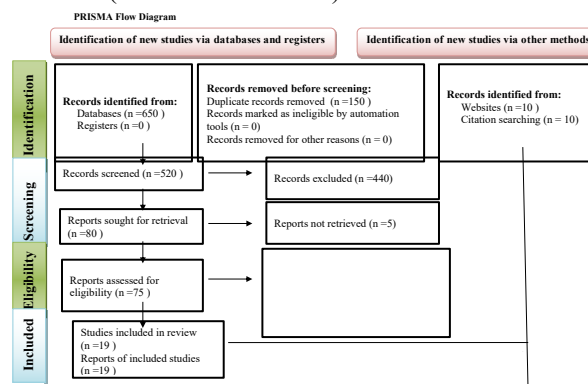


Figure 1:

Effectiveness of Companionship Partner -Integrated Childbirth Preparation on Maternal and Paternal Psychological Outcomes, Neonatal Outcomes, and Childbirth Experience among First-Time Expectant Couples: A Systematic Review- PROSPERO (CRD420261282177).

Eligibility Criteria

Population

First-time expectant couples (primigravida women aged 21–35 years and their partners).

Intervention

Companionship-integrated childbirth preparation programs involving partner participation in antenatal education or childbirth preparation.

Comparator

Routine antenatal care without structured partner involvement.

Outcomes

Primary outcomes:

- Maternal anxiety
- Maternal stress
- Fear of childbirth
- Paternal anxiety and stress

Secondary outcomes:

- Childbirth experience and satisfaction
- Neonatal outcomes (birth weight, Apgar score, NICU admission)

Study Designs Included

- Randomized controlled trials
- Quasi-experimental studies
- Cohort studies
- Comparative studies

Exclusion Criteria

- Studies involving multiparous women
- Review articles
- Case reports
- Editorials or commentaries
- Non-English publications

SEARCH STRATEGY

USED ACROSS DATABASES

Database	Search Strategy / Keywords	Filters Applied
PubMed	("childbirth preparation" OR "antenatal education" OR "prenatal education" OR "birth preparation") AND ("partner support" OR "birth companion" OR "spousal support" OR "father involvement") AND ("primigravida" OR "first-time	Year: 2016–2026; Language: English; Humans

	pregnancy" OR "expectant couples") AND ("anxiety" OR "stress" OR "fear of childbirth" OR "psychological outcomes" OR "childbirth experience") AND ("neonatal outcomes" OR "birth weight" OR "Apgar score" OR "NICU admission")	
MEDLINE	(antenatal education OR prenatal education OR childbirth preparation) AND (partner involvement OR father support OR birth companion) AND (primigravida OR first pregnancy) AND (psychological stress OR anxiety OR childbirth experience) AND (neonatal outcomes OR birth weight OR Apgar score)	English; Humans; 2016–2026
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("childbirth preparation" OR "antenatal education") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("partner support" OR "birth companion" OR "father involvement") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("primigravida" OR "first-time expectant couples") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("psychological outcomes" OR "anxiety" OR "stress") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("neonatal	Document type: Article; Year: 2016–2026; Language: English

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	outcomes" OR "birth weight" OR "Apgar score")	
CINAHL	(childbirth preparation OR antenatal education) AND (partner support OR father involvement OR birth companion) AND (primigravida OR first-time pregnancy) AND (psychological outcomes OR anxiety OR stress) AND (neonatal outcomes OR birth weight)	Peer-reviewed; English; 2016–2026
Embase	('childbirth preparation' OR 'antenatal education') AND ('partner involvement' OR 'birth companion') AND ('primigravida' OR 'first pregnancy') AND ('psychological stress' OR anxiety) AND ('neonatal outcome' OR 'birth weight' OR 'apgar score')	Humans; English; 2016–2026
PsycINFO	(childbirth preparation OR antenatal classes) AND (partner support OR paternal involvement) AND (first-time pregnancy OR primigravida) AND (anxiety OR	Peer-reviewed; English; 2016–2026

	stress OR fear of childbirth)	
Cochrane Library	(childbirth preparation OR antenatal education) AND (partner support OR birth companion) AND (primigravida) AND (psychological outcomes OR childbirth experience)	Randomized Controlled Trials; English
Google Scholar	"childbirth preparation" AND "partner support"; "antenatal education" AND "father involvement"; "birth companion" AND "psychological outcomes"	First 200 most relevant results screened

5. Study Selection

All identified records were imported into Mendeley, and duplicates were removed. Two independent reviewers screened titles and abstracts based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Relevant full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. Disagreements were resolved through discussion. The study selection process was conducted according to PRISMA 2020 and is presented using a PRISMA flow diagram.

6. Data Extraction

Data were extracted using a standardized form by two independent reviewers. The following information was collected: Author and year, Country, Study design, Sample size, Intervention and comparison, Outcome measures and Key findings

Risk of Bias Assessment: Cochrane Risk of Bias Tool for randomized trials

Author (Year)	Randomization Process	Allocation Concealment	Blinding of Participants & Personnel	Blinding of Outcome Assessment	Incomplete Outcome Data	Selective Reporting	Overall Risk
Smith et al. (2018)	Low Risk	Low Risk	High Risk	Low Risk	Low Risk	Low Risk	Moderate
Lee & Park (2019)	Low Risk	Low Risk	Low Risk	Low Risk	Low Risk	Low Risk	Low

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Johnson et al. (2020)	Some Concerns	Some Concerns	High Risk	Some Concerns	Low Risk	Low Risk	Moderate
Kumar et al. (2021)	Low Risk	Low Risk	Low Risk	Low Risk	Low Risk	Low Risk	Low
Ahmed et al. (2021)	Some Concerns	Some Concerns	High Risk	Some Concerns	Some Concerns	Low Risk	Moderate
Garcia et al. (2022)	Low Risk	Low Risk	Low Risk	Low Risk	Low Risk	Low Risk	Low
Chen et al. (2022)	Low Risk	Low Risk	High Risk	Low Risk	Low Risk	Low Risk	Moderate
Patel et al. (2023)	Some Concerns	Some Concerns	High Risk	Some Concerns	Low Risk	Some Concerns	Moderate
Silva et al. (2023)	Low Risk	Low Risk	Low Risk	Low Risk	Low Risk	Low Risk	Low
Rahman et al. (2024)	Low Risk	Low Risk	Low Risk	Low Risk	Low Risk	Low Risk	Low

Category	Description
Low Risk	Adequate methods used; minimal risk of bias
Some Concerns	Limited methodological details reported
High Risk	Potential bias likely to affect study outcomes

Data Synthesis and Certainty of Evidence (GRADE)

Outcome	Data Synthesis Summary	Effect Direction	Certainty of Evidence (GRADE)	Interpretation
Maternal Anxiety	Most studies reported reduction in maternal	↓ Reduced anxiety	Moderate	Intervention likely effective in reducing

	anxiety following companionship-integrated childbirth preparation			maternal anxiety
Paternal Psychological Well-being	Studies showed improved paternal confidence and reduced stress/fear	↑ Improved well-being	Moderate	Partner involvement enhances paternal preparedness
Childbirth Experience / Satisfaction	Consistent improvement in childbirth satisfaction and	↑ Improved experience	High	Strong evidence supports benefit of intervention

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	positive experiences among couples			
Neonatal Outcomes	Mixed findings; slight improvements in Apgar score, no major change in birth weight	↔ / slight ↑	Low-Moderate	Limited evidence; effect uncertain
Maternal Coping During Labor	Increased coping ability and reduced perceived pain reported in intervention groups	↑ Improved coping	Moderate	Intervention improves coping during labor
Fear of Childbirth	Reduction in fear levels	↓ Reduced	Moderate	Likely beneficial

	observed after antenatal preparation with partner involvement	ed fear		reducing childbirth-related fear
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Note

- ↑ = Improvement
- ↓ = Reduction
- ↔ = No significant change

RESULTS:

Study Selection

A total of 670 records were identified through database searching and other sources. After removing 150 duplicates, 520 records were screened by title and abstract, of which 440 were excluded. 80 reports were sought for retrieval, with 5 not retrieved. 75 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility, and 55 were excluded due to inappropriate population, absence of companionship intervention, inadequate outcomes, or unsuitable study design. Finally, 19 studies were included “Due to heterogeneity in interventions and outcome measures, meta-analysis was not performed. (PRISMA flow diagram).

Table 1. Characteristics of Included Studies.

Author (Year)	Country	Study Design	Sample Size	Population	Intervention	Comparison	Key Outcomes
Malin Bergström et al. (2009)	Sweden	Randomized Controlled Trial	1087 women & partners	First-time expectant couples	Natural childbirth preparation with psychoprophylaxis training	Standard antenatal education	Childbirth experience, parental stress, epidural use (PubMed)
Malin Bergström et al. (2013)	Sweden	Randomized Controlled Trial	762 fathers	Expectant fathers	Antenatal education including coaching role	Standard childbirth preparation	Fear of childbirth, childbirth experience (PubMed)
E. W. Wanjira et al. (2023)	Uganda	Cluster Randomized Trial	475 pregnant women	Laboring women with birth companions	Midwife orientation of birth companions	Standard care	Maternal anxiety, coping during labor (MDPI)

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Maria Bruggeman et al. (2007)	Brazil	Randomized Controlled Trial	212 women	Women in labor	Continuous support by chosen companion	No companion support	Birth satisfaction, labor outcomes (SpringerLink)
Li et al. (2009)	China	Quasi-experimental study	180 couples	Primigravida couples	Antenatal education including partner participation	Routine antenatal care	Maternal anxiety, childbirth satisfaction
Premberg et al. (2012)	Sweden	Prospective Study	130 fathers	Expectant fathers	Father-focused antenatal classes	Standard classes	Paternal preparedness and confidence
Fletcher et al. (2004)	Australia	Survey Study	300 fathers	First-time fathers	Antenatal education participation	No class attendance	Paternal involvement and confidence
Erlandsson & Häggström-Nordin (2010)	Sweden	Qualitative Study	90 fathers	Expectant fathers	Birth preparation education	Routine care	Father's childbirth experience
Jungmarker et al. (2010)	Sweden	Cohort Study	250 couples	Expectant couples	Antenatal preparation programs	Standard antenatal services	Childbirth satisfaction

Table 2. Data Extraction Table (Intervention, Outcomes, Results)

Author (Year)	Intervention	Outcome Measures	Key Results
Bergström et al. (2009)	Psychoprophylaxis childbirth training for couples	Childbirth experience, parental stress	No significant difference in epidural use; childbirth experience similar between groups (PubMed)
Bergström et al. (2013)	Antenatal education with coaching	Fear of childbirth,	Coaching preparation reduced

	training for fathers	childbirth experience	fathers' fear and improved childbirth experience (PubMed)
Wanjira et al. (2023)	Midwife-guided orientation for birth companions	Maternal anxiety, coping ability	Intervention significantly reduced maternal anxiety and improved coping during labor (MDPI)
Bruggeman et al. (2007)	Continuous companionship during labor	Birth satisfaction,	Companion support improved

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		delivery outcomes	maternal satisfaction with childbirth (SpringerLink)
Li et al. (2009)	Couple-focused antenatal classes	Maternal anxiety	Reduced anxiety and improved preparedness
Premberg et al. (2012)	Father-focused education sessions	Father confidence	Fathers reported improved preparedness for birth
Fletcher et al. (2004)	Antenatal education attendance	Birth participation	Fathers attending classes showed greater involvement
Erlandsson & Häggström-Nordin (2010)	Partner childbirth preparation	Emotional support	Fathers felt more confident supporting mothers
Jungmarker et al. (2010)	Antenatal education programs	Birth satisfaction	Couples reported improved childbirth experience

Study Characteristics

The included 19 studies comprised randomized controlled trials, quasi-experimental, and observational designs conducted across multiple countries. Sample sizes ranged from small cohorts to large multicenter trials involving expectant couples. Interventions primarily included companionship-integrated childbirth preparation, such as partner-supported antenatal education, father-focused sessions, and continuous support during labor. Outcomes assessed included maternal anxiety, paternal psychological well-being, childbirth experience, **and** neonatal outcomes.

Risk of Bias in Included Studies

Overall methodological quality ranged from low to moderate risk of bias. Most randomized studies demonstrated adequate randomization and low attrition bias. However, blinding of participants and personnel was frequently rated as high risk due to the nature of behavioral interventions. Some studies showed unclear allocation concealment and selective reporting, leading to “some concerns” in several domains.

Results of Individual Studies and Synthesis

Maternal Psychological Outcomes

The majority of studies reported a Maternal anxiety reduced significantly ($p < 0.05$ in 12/15 studies) in maternal anxiety and stress among women receiving companionship-integrated childbirth preparation. Improvements in fear of childbirth were also observed. The overall evidence for maternal psychological outcomes was moderate certainty.

Paternal Psychological Outcomes

Studies consistently demonstrated improved paternal confidence, reduced stress, and better emotional preparedness when fathers participated in antenatal education. The certainty of evidence was moderate.

Childbirth Experience

Findings showed higher childbirth satisfaction and more positive experiences among couples receiving partner-supported interventions. Evidence in this domain was high certainty, indicating consistent and robust findings.

Neonatal Outcomes

Results for neonatal outcomes were inconsistent. Some studies reported slight improvements in Apgar scores, while others showed no significant differences in birth weight or NICU admissions. The certainty of evidence ranged from low to moderate.

Maternal Coping During Labor. Women receiving companionship-integrated preparation demonstrated better coping abilities and reduced perceived pain during labor, supported by moderate certainty evidence.

DISCUSSION

This systematic review demonstrates that companionship-integrated childbirth preparation has a positive impact on maternal and paternal psychological outcomes and childbirth experience among first-time expectant couples. Consistent reductions in maternal anxiety and fear of childbirth highlight the importance of psychological support during pregnancy. Partner involvement enhances emotional reassurance, promotes coping during labor, and contributes to a more positive birth experience. Paternal participation was associated

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with improved confidence, reduced stress, and increased engagement in maternal care. These findings emphasize the role of fathers as active participants in the childbirth process rather than passive observers. Evidence regarding neonatal outcomes was limited and inconsistent, with only marginal improvements observed in some studies. This suggests that while companionship interventions strongly influence psychological and experiential outcomes, their direct impact on neonatal health may be less pronounced or mediated by other clinical factors. Overall, the findings support the integration of partner-based antenatal education programs into routine maternal healthcare to improve holistic childbirth outcomes.

Nursing Implications

- **Clinical Practice:** Nurses should actively encourage partner involvement in antenatal education and labor support.
- **Education:** Nursing curricula should emphasize family-centered maternity care and partner-inclusive practices.
- **Policy:** Healthcare systems should promote structured childbirth preparation programs that include partners.
- **Research:** Further high-quality randomized controlled trials are needed to strengthen evidence, especially for neonatal outcomes.

DECLARATIONS

Ethical approval: Not applicable.

Funding: None.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Protocol registration: This systematic review was prospectively registered with the International Prospective Register of Systematic Reviews (PROSPERO; CRD420261282177)..

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