Abstract

Trauma related to childbirth is seldom addressed despite the incidence of women who experience traumatic births. Birth trauma, like other traumatic events, can have a lasting impact on women and can effect their attachment to their infants. This study gives voice to women's birth trauma and describes what women find helpful in their healing processes from traumatic birth. This study is based on the narratives of 14 women who graciously shared their birth stories and healing journeys in semi-structured qualitative interviews. Their traumatic birth experiences occurred 3 ½ to 26 years ago.

A post-positivist approach and narrative theory informed this study. This research found that participants experienced a discordance of expectations and realities of childbirth, a juxtaposition of emotions and experiences, identified specific aspects that were healing/helpful and other aspects that were hurtful/unhelpful during pregnancy, labor, birth, delivery, and beyond. In the healing process from traumatic childbirth, the specific aspects women identified as being healing and helpful were being heard/listened to, having supportive people in their lives, taking action, having reparative experiences, relying on their faith and spirituality, and creating and telling their birth stories. This research study also found that women who developed a coherent narrative of their traumatic childbirth experiences were more likely to divide their narrative episodically, tell their narrative with a continuous and smooth flow, and had more developed self-evaluations and meanings with regards to their experiences. Implications include care providers across disciplines being knowledgable of birth trauma and its effects and
providing appropriate support and referrals to women who experience birth trauma. It is recommended that care providers assist women with understanding their birth experiences and for social workers and counselors to support women in creating their coherent narratives of their traumatic childbirth experiences as part of their healing processes.