Pressure to Delay Pregnancy and Pregnancy Complications in Women Surgeons

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Background

- The number of women in general surgery residency has steadily increased, and the number of women becoming pregnant during training has also increased.
- Multiple studies\(^1,2,3\) have reported increased risk of miscarriage and pregnancy complications amongst trainees during medical school and surgery residency.
- This is initially hypothesized to be a result of the increased age at first pregnancy of this population.
- Other factors that could contribute are hours standing, night shift, on-call hours, and overall work hours.
- Prior work suggests there is pressure to delay pregnancy until post-training.

Research Aim

We investigated commonalities amongst pregnancy complications and potential links to delaying family planning within the women surgeons population.

Methods

- Study of Physicians And Children: Expectations and Experiences (SPACE) Questionnaire 2021
- Recruitment through social media and national organizations
- Sub-analysis of women surgeons who had experienced at least 1 pregnancy (n=132 of total 3200 respondents).

Results: Pregnancy Complications

- Most participants were surgeons (63%) or residents (37%).
- Most had their first child during residency (53%).
- Average age at first pregnancy was 33 years compared to 27 years\(^4\) nationally for women.
- 70% had diagnosed infertility as compared to 20% nationally\(^1\).
- Miscarriage rate of 26% in the national population1 compared to women surgeons 42%.
- 14% had an unplanned c-section compared to 11% nationally\(^2\).
- Prematurity rate 20% was compared to 10% nationally\(^1\).

Results: Regret and Pressure

- 90% of respondents were concerned about their fertility declining during training.
- 60% delayed childbearing until after training.
- Of the participants who delayed childbearing, 90% regretted the decision.

Citations


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