

Title: Too Posh To Push? Comparative perspectives on maternal request caesarean sections in Canada, the US, the UK and Finland

Authors: Ivy Lynn Bourgeault, Eugene Declercq, Jane Sandall, Sirpa Wrede, Meredith Vanstone, Edwin van Teijlingen, Raymond DeVries and Cecilia Benoit

Journal: Advances in Medical Sociology 10, 99-123

Abstract

Purpose – This chapter critically examines the purportedly growing phenomenon of Maternal Request Caesarean Sections (MRCS) and its relative contribution to the rising caesarean section (CS) rates.

Methodology – We apply a decentred comparative methodological approach to this problem by drawing upon and comparatively examining empirical data from Canada, the US, the UK and Finland.

Findings – We find that the general argument that has emerged within the obstetric community, evidenced in particular by a recent “State of the Science” conference, is that the reduced risks and benefits of MRCS are evenly balanced, thus ethically it could be seen as a valid choice for women. This approach, taken in particular in the North American context, negates the problematic nature of accurately measuring, and therefore assessing the importance of maternal request in addressing rising CS rates. Moreover, although some of the blame for rising CS rates has focused on MRCS, we argue that it has a relatively minor influence on rising rates. We show instead how rising CS rates can more appropriately be attributed to obstetrical policies and practices.

Originality – In presenting this argument, we challenge some of the prevailing notions of consumerism in maternity care and its influence on the practice patterns of maternity care professionals.

Practical implications – Our argument also calls into question how successful efforts to address MRCS will be in reducing CS rates given its relatively minor influence.