

## **ABSTRACT**

**Background:** Worldwide, approximately 810 women die every day from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. Unpreparedness for child birth contributes to delays that lead to maternal and perinatal deaths. Women with prior caesarean section are at a particularly increased risk for complications in case of delays during child birth.

**Aim:** To determine the prevalence and factors associated with unpreparedness for childbirth and document women's experiences contributing to unpreparedness for childbirth at Mbarara Regional Referral Hospital.

**Methods:** We conducted a mixed methods cross-sectional study from March to June 2023 using structured questionnaires to obtain data on sociodemographic characteristics, antenatal care, and obstetric factors associated with unpreparedness for childbirth. Statistical analysis was done using modified Poisson regression, with significance set at  $p < 0.05$ . In-depth interviews were used to collect qualitative data on women's experiences contributing to unpreparedness for childbirth. This data was synthesized and presented according to pre-determined themes corresponding with the components of the Birth preparedness and complication readiness plan.

**Results:** A total of 591 women with prior caesarean delivery were enrolled in this study. The mean age was 28 ( $SD \pm 4.7$ ) years. Majority, 455 (77%) of the women were unprepared for childbirth. Factors independently associated with unpreparedness for childbirth were: age less than 25 years and age 35 years or more, partner with irregular source of income, failure to discuss a birth preparedness plan at antenatal care and not being escorted by a partner for antenatal care. Women elaborated experiences contributing to unpreparedness for childbirth that ranged from: not being educated about all the requirements for childbirth at antenatal care, inadequate financial support from their husbands, to expecting that hospitals were stocked with all items for childbirth.

**Conclusion:** Most women with prior caesarean delivery at Mbarara Regional Referral Hospital are unprepared for childbirth. A birth preparedness and complication readiness plan should be written for women with prior caesarean section during antenatal care. Male partners should be involved in developing the birth preparedness and complication readiness plan.

