



# Should pregnancy be classed as a disease?

Dr Taryn Knox

Department of Bioethics

University of Otago

[taryn.knox@otago.ac.nz](mailto:taryn.knox@otago.ac.nz)

# Smajdor and Räsänen

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- Conceptual
  - Like a disease
    - Is risky – harms “from discomfort to death”
    - Can be treated medically
    - Risk of getting pregnant can be reduced by using prophylactic measures.
  - Unlike a disease,
    - Is functional – but covertly value-laden
    - Currently required for species survival – but ectogenesis
    - Valued (wanted pregnancies) – but still disvalued aspects of pregnancy

Smajdor, A., & Räsänen, J. (2024). Is pregnancy a disease? A normative approach. *Journal of Medical Ethics*

# Smajdor and Räsänen

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- Normative
  - Classifying pregnancy as disease would lead to “better treatment for women”

*Among women who are pregnant, their preferences in terms of pain relief, mode of delivery, are frequently ignored precisely because the ‘normalness’ of these conditions mean that their detrimental effects on women are disregarded and the norms of medical ethics that govern doctor/patient interactions are often swept aside. To construe pregnancy and childbirth as a disease may offer an opportunity to reconfigure the relationship between the pregnant woman and the medical establishment (p7).*

1. *Among women who are pregnant, their preferences in terms of pain relief, mode of delivery, are frequently ignored ...*
2. *... Precisely because the 'normalness' of these conditions mean that their detrimental effects on women are disregarded and the norms of medical ethics that govern doctor/patient interactions are often swept aside.*
3. *To construe pregnancy and childbirth as a disease may offer an opportunity to reconfigure the relationship between the pregnant woman and the medical establishment (p7).*

# Pregnant people are often not listened to

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- Especially in childbirth
- Van der Pijl et al. “Left Powerless” *PLoS One* 15, no. 5 (2020): e0233114.

*Literally in between my legs, they are deliberating about an episiotomy. Nobody asks me anything.” (story 332)*

*My waters broke and straight away I had MASSIVE contractions. “This is nothing yet—it could easily take another week” said the OB. The pain made me vomit. The hospital midwife refused to check my dilation. I asked more than 10 times, and when she finally relented: 9 centimeters. 10 minutes later, my daughter is born.” (story 248)*

*Unbearable pain; I was panicking. Every request for an epidural was ignored. “Your body will never give you more pain than you can handle” (story 275)*

*“I don’t understand that you don’t want this. You don’t want the baby to die in your belly, do you?” After I refused a scalp electrode. (story 419)*

# Why are pregnant people are not listened to?

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- Smajdor and Räsänen

*Among women who are pregnant, their preferences in terms of pain relief, mode of delivery, are frequently ignored precisely because the 'normalness' of these conditions mean that their detrimental effects on women are disregarded ...(p7).*

- Issues of informed consent
- Misogyny
- Medicalisation
- Preferences are harmful to maternal/neonatal outcomes
- Dual-patient model

Would giving pregnancy disease-status help pregnant people's preferences to be respected?

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*“To construe pregnancy and childbirth as a disease may offer an opportunity to reconfigure the relationship between the pregnant woman and the medical establishment.” (p7)*

- In a practical, not legal, sense.
- How would giving pregnancy disease-status help people who don't want intervention?

## The (my) last word

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- Giving pregnancy disease-status might help those pregnant people who want intervention, but not those who don't want it.
- Therefore, there is insufficient normative reason to classify pregnancy as a disease.