

A national survey of postnatal women's experiences of labour and birth and birth experiences

Anna Davies¹, Gemma Clayton¹, Emma Harvey¹, Narendra Mampitiya¹, Lucy Willis¹, Tamarind Russell-Webster¹, Eva Larkai¹, Miriam Toolan¹, Mary Lynch^{1,3}, Abi Merriel²

¹University of Bristol ²University of Liverpool, ³North Bristol NHS Trust

Why did we conduct this research?

Congruence between labour expectations and actual birth experiences is associated with psychological wellbeing after childbirth. An expectations-outcomes mismatch has been associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and reduced satisfaction, with consequent family impact¹.

Aims

We aimed to explore postnatal women's expectations of childbirth, the extent to which they were met, and perceived factors influencing their congruence in a group of postnatal women.

Methods

Online cross-sectional survey of postnatal women in the UK.

Sample

We recruited primiparous and multiparous postnatal women (age>16 years) who had given birth in the last 5 years.

Recruitment

Social media advertising and snowballing between June 2019 and July 2020.

Survey

Women completed an online questionnaire using iteratively developed and piloted multiple-choice questions, which explored:

- Whether their birth was as expected
- Perceived preparedness for birth

Open-ended questions explored reasons for expectation-outcome congruence/incongruence

Analysis

Data from multiple choice questions were analysed in STATA and summarised using descriptive statistics.

Qualitative responses were thematically analysed by ≥2 researchers to support validity of coding.

References

¹Webb R, Ayers S, Bogaerts A, Jeličić L, Pawlicka P, Van Haeken S, Uddin N, Xuereb RB, Kolesnikova N; When birth is not as expected: a systematic review of the impact of a mismatch between expectations and experiences. BMC Pregnancy Childbirth. 2021 Jul 2;21(1):475. doi: 10.1186/s12884-021-03898-z.

Figure 1: What your birth better or more difficult than expected?

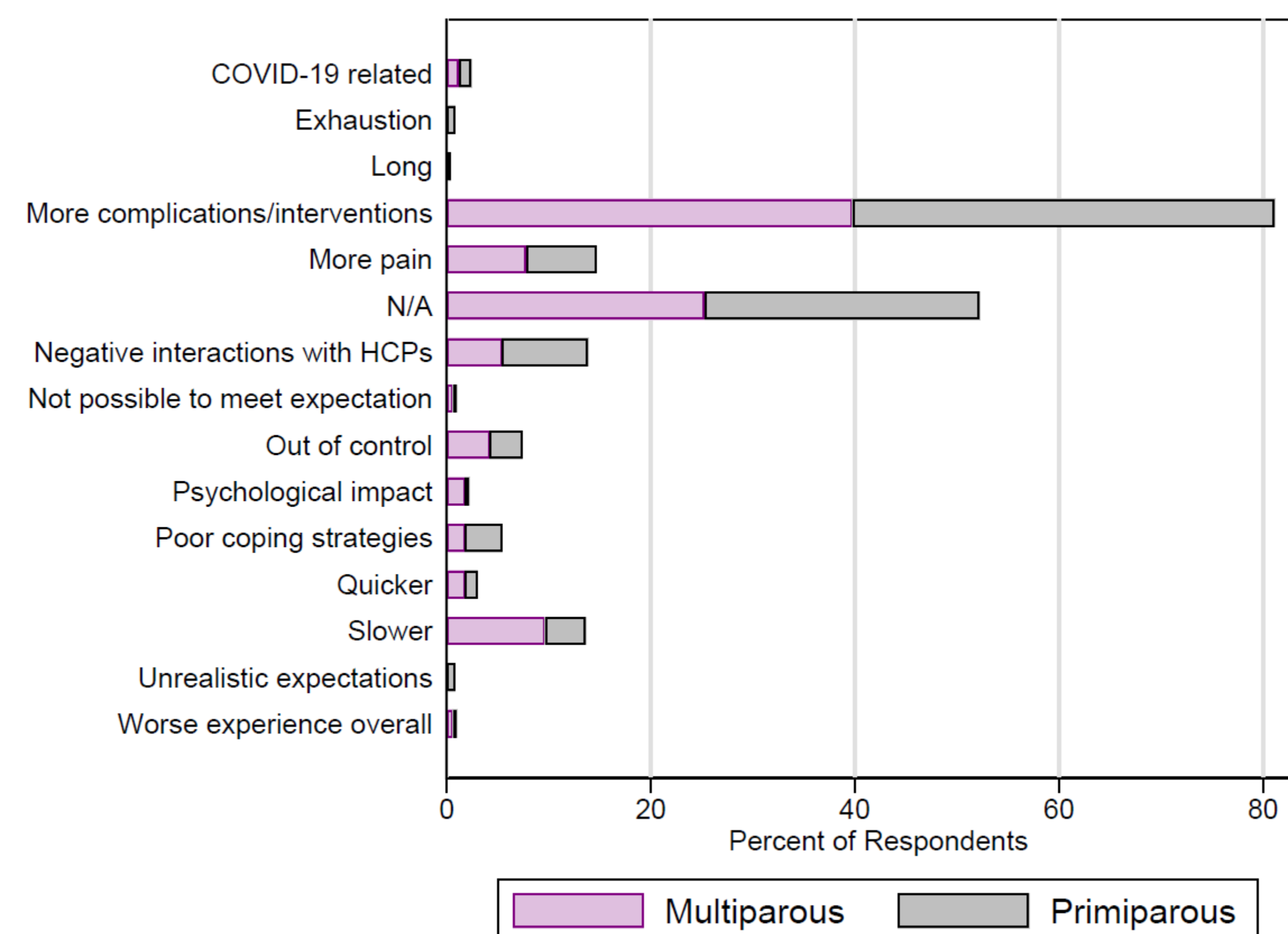
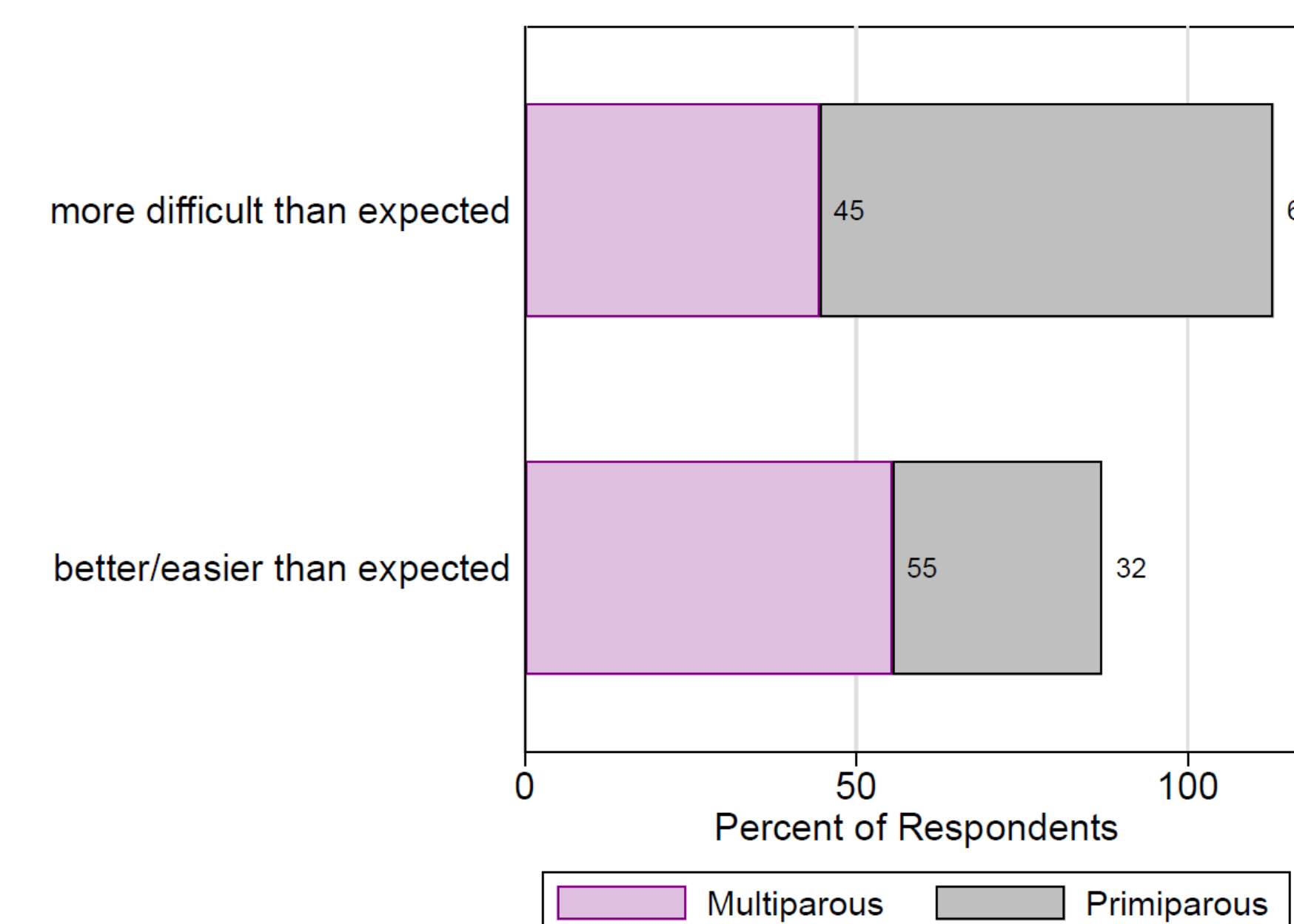


Figure 2: Why was your birth better than expected?

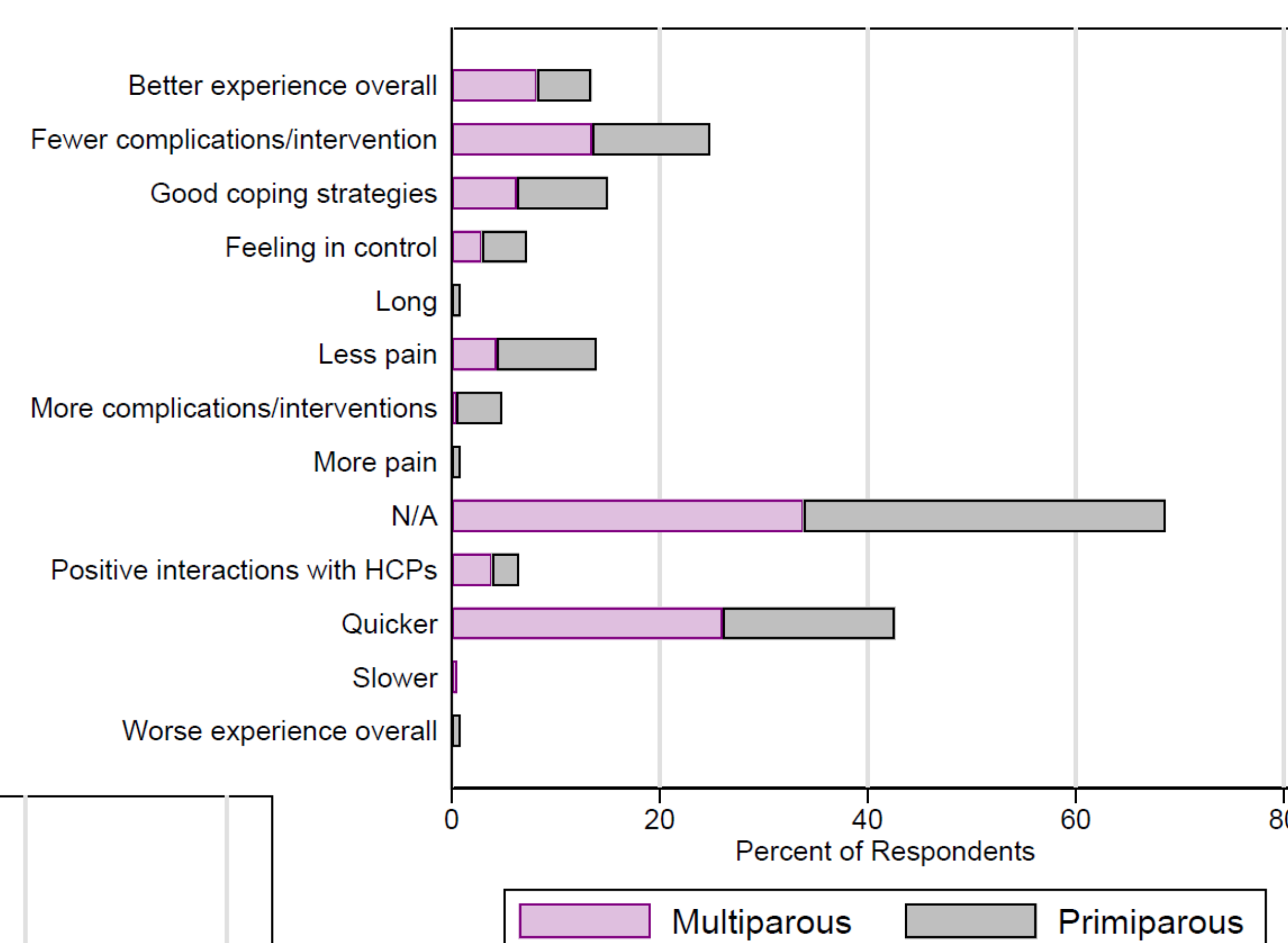


Figure 3: Why was your birth worse than expected?

- A substantial number of both primiparous and multiparous women report birth is more difficult than anticipated.
- Difficulties largely relate to unanticipated complications and intervention.
- There is a need to improve understanding of likelihood and nature of birth complications to prepare women and support psychological wellbeing.
- Clinical interactions and antenatal education should address this important barrier to women's wellbeing.



Antenatal Care Education



Results

819 women completed the survey (46% primiparous)

Ethnicity: 93.5% White British, 87.8% born in the UK

Education: 75.9% Degree level education or above

Birth mode:

- Vaginal 56.8%, VBAC 21.0%,
- Instrumental 13.4%,
- Unplanned caesarean 13.4%,
- Planned caesarean 11.8%,
- Other 0.6%

Antenatal classes attended for most recent pregnancy:

- 50.4% NHS +/- private, 25.6% private only, 23.9% did not attend any

Birth expectations:

- **738** women indicated their birth was not as expected (49% primiparous, 51% multiparous), of which 56% found it more difficult and 44% easier or as expected (see figure 1).

Conclusions and recommendations

CONTACT: Dr Anna Davies **Email:** anna.davies@bristol.ac.uk **Twitter:** @DrAnnaDavies