

Trends in caesarean section rates at a maternity hospital in Mumbai, India.

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Abstract

The steady rise in caesarean section rates is an emerging area of concern in mother-child healthcare and a matter of international attention, since the trend is no longer confined to western industrialized countries. Crude and caesarean section-related perinatal mortality and case-fatality rates may well serve as public-health indicators. Monitoring time-trends in caesarean section rates has been considered a useful approach in the recognition of this rapidly-changing health policy and in estimating the magnitude of this problem. The study examined the observed time-trends in caesarean section rates in relation to perinatal mortality rates and maternal case-fatality rates in a hospital setting in Mumbai, India, using 1957-1998 data on retrospective cohort. Both overall rates and those specific to type of delivery were assessed. During 1957-1998, the caesarean section rates in the Nowrosjee Wadia Maternity Hospital (NWMH) increased from 1.9% to 16%, with the most significant rise over the past decade. The perinatal mortality rate showed a significant reduction from 69 per 1,000 in 1957 to 36 per 1,000 in 1992 and remained steady in the 1990s despite the higher caesarean section rates. The caesarean section rate in the NWMH rose by almost 10-fold during 1957-1998. No improvement in perinatal outcome was observed beyond a caesarean section rate of 10%, but the perinatal mortality rate in caesarean births increased significantly due to a more liberal use of caesarean sections in preterm deliveries and those that yielded low-birth-weight babies.