

Childbirth

“..... Because its easier”

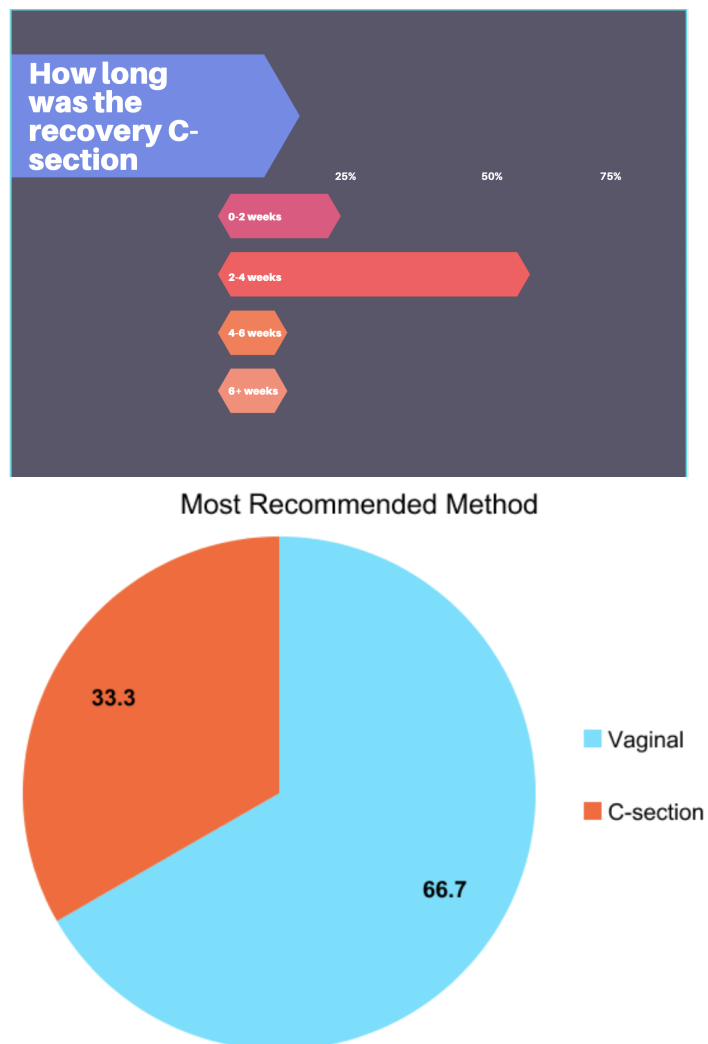
As an 18-year-old, the only knowledge I have of birth and its birthing process is close to slim. If I were to be asked which method I would prefer, I would say vaginal birth because it's easier and does not require stitching. I would also say because I would recover faster, which is not the case. If you were to ask me what contractions are, I would simply reply with “cramps”. I have come to learn that not all birthing experiences are the same, no two bodies are the same, everything depends on the mother's body and her preference. To help with my research I carried out a questionnaire to help me better understand the difference between the two types of labour and after birth.

There are two types of birth, the **C-section** and the **vaginal** Birth.

A c-section is a surgical method of giving birth that takes around 20-45 minutes to complete. This is where the baby is removed by making an incision in the mothers' abdomen and a second incision in the mothers' uterus. This causes greater discomfort for the mother, which could potentially last for several months. After taking out the baby, the incisions are stitched back together using a dissolvable material that the mother's body can later break down. Depending on where the mother gave birth, the mother is required to stay in hospital for 2-4 hours after birth in the ICU, followed by a few days in a room for observation. After 4-6 weeks postpartum, the mother will be able to bend down more freely as well as partake in intercourse.

The side effects caused by C-section would be:

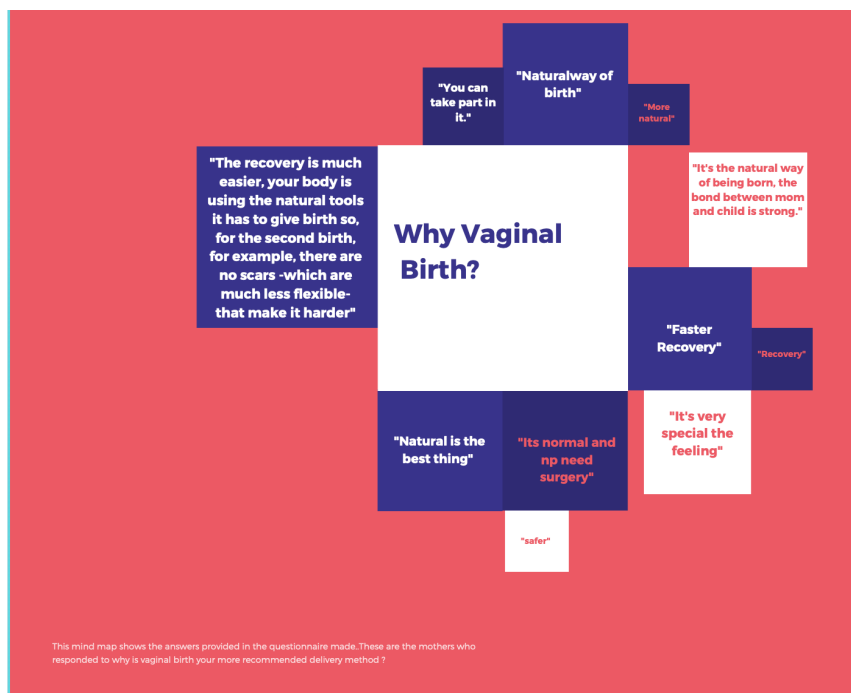
- worsening pain.
- fever
- Increased vaginal bleeding.
- increased redness at the incision site.



- drainage or swelling of the surgical incision.
- breast pain with redness or fever.
- foul-smelling vaginal discharge.
- pain when urinating.

When described by mothers, c-section was referred to as the “harder” method.

Around 35% of the births that were recorded were by c-section. This method was recommended because it eliminates the element of surprise so that the mother can be fully prepared. It is also recommended because the level of pain is much less than natural birth to some mothers. Another reason why the c-section was recommended was that it decreases the risk of harm to the baby and “avoid suffering” as well as decreases the risk for the mother herself. It was stated that c-section birth is more impersonal as you don’t get to experience the “full experience” of giving birth. C-sections may leave insecurities such as “belly divided into 2 parts”. Mothers also believe that doctors suggest it as it is much more convenient for them and they are simply “lazy”.



Vaginal birth is a process of birth, which can last up to 12-18 hours, this is where the skin and muscle around the area would stretch to allow the baby to travel through the birthing canal and out in between the mothers' vagina (labia) and her rectum (perineum). The muscle reaches a point of maximum stretching. These stretches are called contractions. Every time a mother

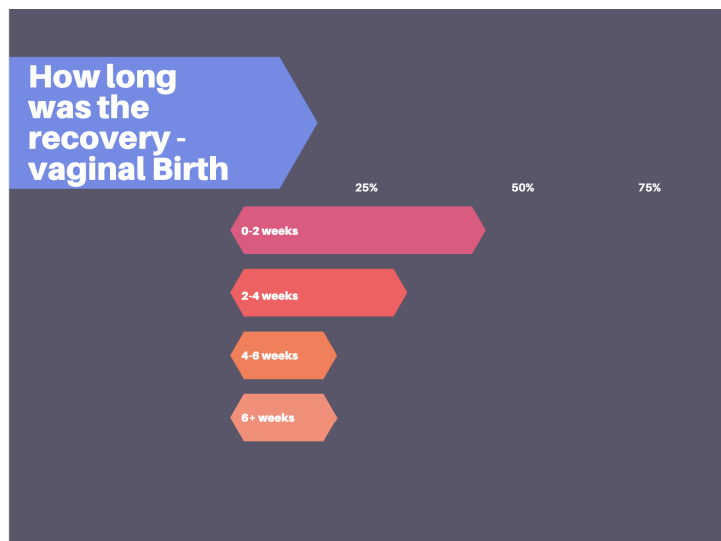
would get a contraction, the muscles would stretch out more. These contractions come every 2-3 minutes and last around 50-70 seconds each. When a mother reaches around 10cm, she will start the process of pushing the fetus out at every contraction she gets. It feels like a burning sensation.

After labour, if the mother tore her skin near the vagina, she would need stitches. These stitches could have closed an episiotomy (a cut that enlarges the opening of the vagina). the stitches dissolve within weeks.

After giving birth, the vagina might feel dry (due to the lower levels of oestrogen in your body compared to when you were pregnant.). or sore for some time as well as have perineal pain or pain during sex, it can feel looser, softer and more 'open'. The woman's vagina might also look wider than it did, and it might not go back to how it looked like before birth.

Side effects of vaginal birth are:

- tears in the perineum (area behind the vaginal wall)
- increased pain
- haemorrhoids.
- bowel issues.
- urinary inconsistency.
- psychological trauma.



The majority of mothers who participated in the questionnaire delivered preferred Vaginal birth. Based on the answers I got back, many preferred this method due to its fast recovery rate and its safety compared to others. Mothers who answered have also stated that mothers have a stronger bond with the child since the mothers take part in the birth process. Many mothers who prefer it suggest that since they will not be doing surgery, although vaginal birth might still require stitching.

Unlike C-section, having a natural delivery will not leave visible scars behind from the stitching which could potentially make it harder for the mothers' recovery and could lead to postpartum depression. When recommended by other mothers, vaginal birth was known to be "very painful but worth it".

Reviewing the answers, I came across a recommendation made by one of the mothers. It was recommended to take part in “ Psychoprophylactic delivery”. This, according to The Free Dictionary (2009), “a method of preparing women for childbirth without anaesthetic, by means of education, psychological and physical conditioning, and breathing exercises”. It made it easier for the mother to deliver her babies due to these exercises.

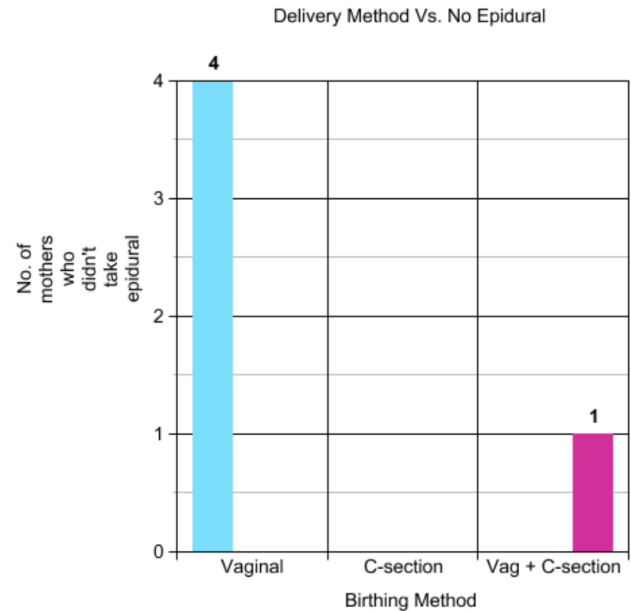
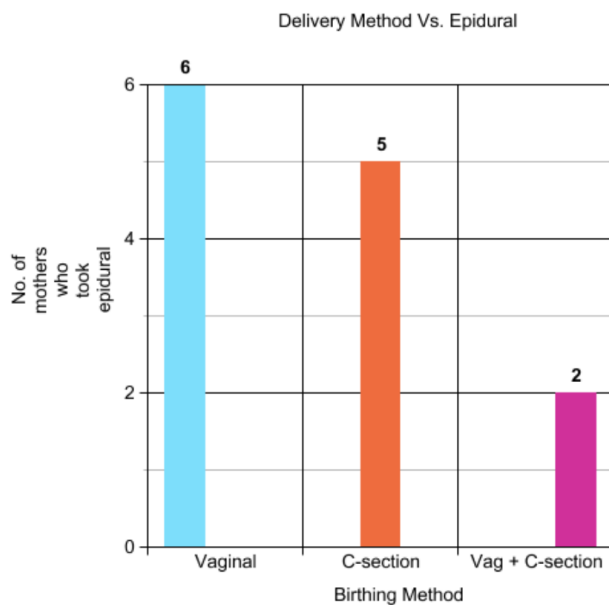
Based on just this research alone, my assumptions were wrong, I did not know to answer the questions asked. Vaginal Birth may be easier for some women, but for others, being in labour for that long and being in pain for 12-18 hours would be considered more painful than a surgery that lasts 30-45 mins.

“There are more natural births than c-section births”. This hypothesis turned out to be true. Overall there were 49 births recorded, 35% of those births were by c-section whereas the majority of 65% of babies were delivered by vaginal birth.

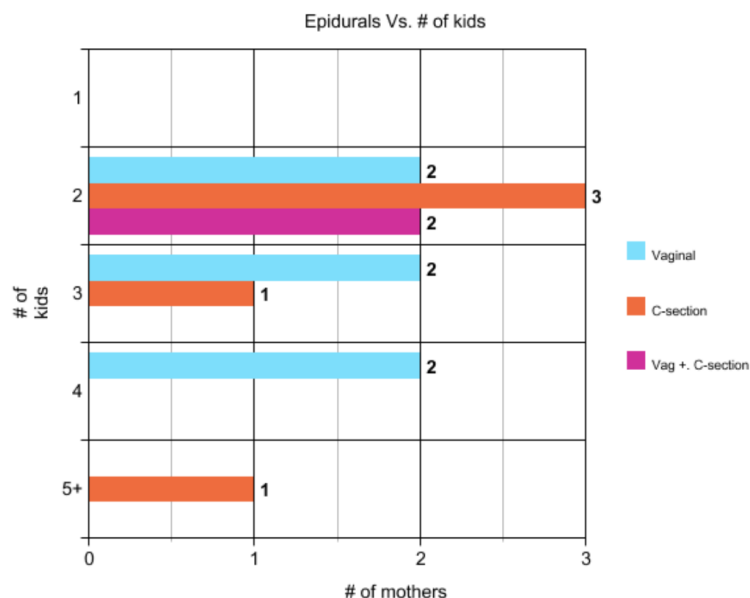
To help reduce the pain from labour, mothers might have an epidural. This is a method of administration where the medicine is injected into the epidural space around the spinal cord to help ease pain and work as a local anaesthetic. But according to ‘Healthline, epidural side effects can make the pushing and process of labour much harder and difficult for the mother, it also increases the chance of a mother getting a perineal tear. Epidurals also may cause a problem for the mother while urinating and may even cause respiratory distress for the fetus. The needle from the epidural might hit a nerve which could potentially cause the mother to be paralyzed from the lower body for a short period. I have not come across a mother who has experienced any of those, so a point of view may come later on.

83.3% of the mothers who answered have taken epidural, 27.8% don't recommend it. Many mothers stated that the epidural "lessens" the pain of the birth process, we would be able to make use of modern technology and enjoy the birthing process more. According to the questionnaire, Epidurals make it safer for the baby. Epidurals sometimes are a waste since they might "kick in" after the baby has been delivered. They also allow the mother to “enjoy the beautiful moment of giving birth.”

A hypothesis I wanted to further investigate. “ Epidurals help with the mothers' recovery rate”. This turned out to be incorrect. Some mothers who took the epidural had recoveries lasting 6+ weeks and mothers who did not take the epidural also had recoveries that lasted 6+ weeks. Although most mothers' recovery time for both epidural and no epidural ranges from 0 - 4 weeks.



As I was looking for data to prove my previous hypothesis, I came up with an evaluation that “most mothers that deliver using natural/vaginal birth are more likely to use epidurals”. I have two sets of data that conflict with each other within a few per cent. To further investigate my hypothesis, I did research. This research shows how mothers who are giving birth by c-section are more likely to be on general anaesthetic as they will be ‘under the knife’ and that the epidural would be used only to help decrease the pain of the contractions. Unlike mothers who give birth by c-section, mothers who deliver naturally need the epidural to help numb pain but still be able to be aware and deliver the child safely.



My next hypothesis is “women with more kids are more likely to get epidurals”. This is incorrect since epidurals are taken based on preference. Mothers who have 2 kids may have received an epidural for both kids, whereas a mother with 4 kids may have not received an epidural for any births.

After the birth of her child, the mother's body gets rid of the blood and the tissue that was inside the uterus otherwise called vaginal

discharge or lochia. The first stage in this process lasts a few days where the discharge would contain bright red, heavy blood which may have blood clots within it. The second stage of this process is where the blood flow and darkness of colour decreases which will eventually lead to no discharge.

Overall, every mother has a preference depending on what she prefers or what's best for her and the fetuses safety. While carrying out this research I came across a method of training I have never heard of before which was recommended by one of the mothers. This training helps the mother give birth easier, even without an epidural. I have come to realize that there is more than what meets the eye. There are more aspects to giving birth and the thought process behind what type of method you want if given the choice.

When interviewing a mother who has experienced c-section multiple times, she explained it as progressive since each birth made her feel differently. The first birth was "exciting, yet nerve-wracking", the second birth was "fun" after those two births, it became risky as the mother was going into surgery multiple times. The first moments of labour was a moment where many feelings were being developed, one being impatience, the wait to see who the baby would resemble more, the mother or father. A factor that helped the mother during labour was having a supportive family around.

A piece of advice that the mother gave to share with other mothers-to-be is to "go to the hairdresser" and prepare yourself for "the next milestone" of your life, but to be prepared that your stomach might "never return to its normal state".

As a final question, I asked the mother if she would rather have had vaginal birth instead?, her answer was no. She believed that she would rather suffer from the pain after giving birth rather than be in pain while delivering, she knew in 20 minutes once the operation is done she would have met the newest family member. She had a time frame to work within so that she didn't panic.

After learning more about this topic of research, I think that every young female should know what their body will be going through and that they are well educated on that subject so that their judgement can't be altered without their consent. Having this much more knowledge allows me to mentally and physically prepare myself.

I have gained a new level of respect for all mothers out there. I would have never thought that this much pain and effort would be needed during birth.

