

## Birth plan: perceptions of citizens and health professionals

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### ABSTRACT

**BACKGROUND:** The birth plan (BP) is a written document elaborated by the couple in order to express their wishes regarding their labor/birth. Since 1990, studies have shown that BP facilitates the fulfillment of the expectations, satisfaction, efficacy and empowerment of women/couples, as well as to improve the communication with health professionals (HP)<sup>[1,2,3]</sup>. In Portugal there is a lack of studies in this area<sup>[4]</sup>. **OBJECTIVE:** To know the perceptions of the HP and the citizens related to the difficulties of elaboration and implementation of the BP. **METHODS:** Qualitative, exploratory and descriptive study. Two questionnaires were used, one addressed to HP and another to citizens, containing 20 mixed questions of self-filling and available on an online platform between April and May 2018. For the statistical treatment, was used tool SPSS25; for the analysis of the open questions was conducted an analysis of content and was used the program INVivo12. A non-probabilistic, intentional sample was carried out with health professionals (n=188, 93.1% female, x=44.2 years, mostly work on differentiated care and 41.1% have helped draw up a BP) and citizens (n=353, female=97.8%, x=32.7 years, 36.5% of which living in the North and 31.7% in Lisbon and Vale do Tejo, 36.5% have a child and 62.6% didn't use BP). Confidentiality and anonymity data were guaranteed. **RESULTS:** 26.6% of the citizens used BP, of which 39.4% reported, among others, the following difficulties to elaborate: lack of information, ignorance of the options available, be afraid to write something that would undermine them. Regarding HP, of the 44.1% who have helped devise a BP 71.1% reported mainly the following difficulties: ignorance or lack of information for women/couple and the physical, human and bureaucratic constraints of the institutions that limit choices. Regarding the citizens (18.1%) who used the BP, they indicated that wasn't accepted by the health team justifying that the HP rejected it, devalued it, disrespected it or ignored it. Of the HP who helped to elaborate the BP, 63.9% stated that it is not accepted in the institutions because: HP want routine practices, do not involve the woman/couple in decisions, institutions have strict protocols, predominating the medicalization, and they don't have the conditions to satisfy the woman's/couple's choices. **CONCLUSIONS:** These results reveal that there seems to be some similarities between the perception of citizens and HP, about the

type of difficulties in the elaboration of BP. However, HP seem to have a more negative perception that the citizens about its implementation.

**Keywords:** *birth plan, health professionals, citizens, decisions*

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