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HOME SWEET HOME BIRTH:

A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE
PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF HOME BIRTH

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Psychology
at Massey University.

Helen Mary Griffin
1994
ABSTRACT

The management of pregnancy and childbirth, and the home as a location of birth, are all topics subject to considerable debate. Such debate often relies on emotive appeal rather than reference to relevant research.

A series of three interviews were conducted with seven women planning home births. The most important reasons why women decided to have a home birth were the desire to have an established relationship with their midwife, wanting continuity of care from their midwife, wanting family involvement in the birth and wishing to retain control and avoid interventions.

Postnatally, in most instances, high levels of satisfaction were expressed by women about the quantity and quality of information they received, the care they received from health professionals, their satisfaction with the birth experience and with their relationships with health professionals. Most women did not experience feelings of loss of control at the birth and the majority of women did not experience feelings of depression postnatally.

Women's perceptions of pregnancy and childbirth were in accordance with the midwifery model of childbirth and it is proposed that women seeking home births hold a deeper and more encompassing belief in the tenets of the midwifery model in comparison to women who have hospital births. Findings are also in accordance with other research, both national and international.
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Secondly, my supervisor Cheryl Woolley. I would particularly like to thank her for her acceptance of and tolerance towards the presence of my daughter (who seems to have an aversion to childcare) during supervisory sessions.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the Palmerston North domiciliary midwives who handed out Information Sheets to their clients. And in particular to Priscilla Baken and Fiona Barnett, for also reading and commenting on parts of my thesis.

Thanks are also due to my partner Andrew Boyle for his belief in me, encouragement, lateral thinking and computer skills. And, last but not least, to my children who must remain the original impetus for my fascination with pregnancy and childbirth.
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Apgar score  One minute and five minutes after birth all babies are assessed using this scoring system. The Apgar score provides a rapid assessment of the baby’s condition and is based on a baby’s heart rate, respiratory effort, muscle tone, grimace (reflex irritability) and colour. The range goes from zero to ten. Ten is the maximum score, although rarely achieved. A score of five or below means the infant is depressed and at the five minute assessment can be associated with residual neurologic damage or even neonatal death.

Domiciliary midwife  Strictly speaking this term applies to any midwife who provides antenatal, intrapartum, or post-partum care to a woman in their own home. For the purposes of this thesis, however, it will be used exclusively for midwives practicing as home birth midwives. Hence, in this thesis the terms domiciliary and home birth midwife/midwives are synonymous.

Independent midwife  A term applying to any self-employed midwife. In this thesis it applies to midwives who provide antenatal and postnatal care in the home and who also provide women with intrapartum care in the hospital.

Epidural  Lumbar epidural injection of local anaesthetic. Narcotics which numb the lower half of the body are given by continuous infusion in the epidural space. Commonly used for pain control in obstetric practice.

PNMR  Perinatal mortality rate
MMR  Maternal mortality rate
MHBA  Manawatu Home Birth Association
ARM  Artificial rupture of the membranes
GA  General anaesthetic
Oxytocin  A drug to stimulate uterine contractions
Episiotomy  Incision into the perineum in the second stage of labour
GPU  General practitioner unit
Margaret  Pseudonym used for all midwives
Richard  Pseudonym used for all doctors

[...] Indicates words have been left out of a sentence
[....] Indicates a sentence missing between sentences
[ ]  With a word inside the brackets means that word has been added to a quote to aid comprehension