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MIDWIVES' USE OF UNORTHODOX THERAPIES:

A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

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

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ABSTRACT

In New Zealand independent midwives are increasingly incorporating unorthodox therapies into their practice. This research studied the experience of metropolitan midwives using unorthodox therapies within the existing medically dominated maternity care system. It also explored the forces that facilitated and constrained midwives in their use of unorthodox therapies.

Feminist case study method was used to research the experience of five independent midwives who had integrated unorthodox therapies and practices into their midwifery practice. Their individual stories are related in separate chapters. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather the data which was analysed using the feminist concepts of power and gender.

Three key points emerged from the analysis. The midwives strongly believed that the way in which they used unorthodox therapies in their practice benefitted and empowered women. Secondly, they had some concerns regarding knowledge of unorthodox therapies. Thirdly, the midwives who used unorthodox therapies felt professionally vulnerable within the biomedical orthodoxy.

Feminist theory was used to analyse the data and enabled the researcher to place midwives' use of unorthodox therapies within a broader socio-political context. It is hoped that this may stimulate midwives to examine their own use of unorthodox therapies as well as provide the impetus to initiate change within both the bio-medical orthodox maternity system and alternative health movement.
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