



media release

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Study researches birth satisfaction for first time mothers

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A pilot University of Otago study investigating factors that contribute to birth satisfaction for first time New Zealand mothers has led to a bigger nationwide study examining how birth preparation impacts on birth satisfaction.

Anne Howarth, PhD researcher at the University of Otago's Department of Psychological Medicine, undertook a Master's degree qualitative study of birth satisfaction among a small sample of women who had just given birth. Four articles detailing the findings have recently been published or are currently in press in international journals: the *Journal of Health Psychology*; *Midwifery*; and the *New Zealand College of Midwifery Journal*.

She says that birth satisfaction is important because how a mother perceives the birth of her child influences her confidence in mothering abilities and consequently the early mother/child relationship. In turn this impacts on the child's sense of security as well as family psychosocial health. She found that the women, who came from the Dunedin area, wanted to feel safe, have good relationships with those caring for them, and to have responsibility for and control over their birth processes.

"This also meant they had a desire to take part in decision-making about medical interventions considered necessary," she says.

"These factors all contributed towards a woman experiencing birth satisfaction. In particular, vulnerable women appreciated the close relationships they established with their midwives."

She also found that those women needing an intervention to give birth, such as a forceps delivery, were very grateful that skilled obstetric help was available.

"However, a poor relationship between midwife and specialist could contribute towards distress experienced by the women, as did an obstetrician's lack of attention to bedside manner," she says.

"On the other hand, as one woman found, a few minutes taken by the obstetric team to introduce themselves and explain their roles resulted in her retaining a sense of personal control throughout the intervention. This resulted in an empowering and very satisfying birth experience for her, despite the necessity of an unexpected medical intervention".

"Despite professional differences in philosophy, women understood that everyone involved with their efforts to give birth – whether obstetricians or midwives – all wanted the best for the new baby and mum."

Ms Howarth is looking for 180 couples (expectant first time mothers aged from 18 to 42 and less than 24 weeks pregnant, and partners) to take part in a larger study called “Giving birth for the first time in New Zealand”.

This study will investigate how birth preparation affects labour and birth, and subsequently birth and family satisfaction for both mothers and fathers for the first six months of parenting a first child.

The study is outlined on the website <http://firsttimebirth.co.nz>, or contact Anne directly by email: cocan807@student.otago.ac.nz, or by cellphone: 02 BIRTHING or 02 2478 4464.

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