

## Birth experiences as reflected in drawings by home-birth mothers and hospital-birth mothers

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The number of women who decide to give birth at home has risen over the last few years. Nevertheless, the lack of public awareness regarding emotional, physiological and social implications of home births, together with political and economic considerations, are creating difficulties for both mothers and midwives. Israeli law permits home births, but the Ministry of Health's official policy is that the best place to give birth is at hospital. The home birth phenomenon presents a critical alternative to the medicalization of birth in the West. Over the past few decades, a large amount of research has been conducted which asserts that most pregnancies are healthy, and therefore do not require medical intervention. Moreover, unnecessary medical intervention has negative implications: the feeling of loss of control, the oppression of the woman's desires, and the need for additional medical intervention (Boucher, Bennett, McFarlin & Freeze, 2009; Cahill, 2000; Janssen et al., 2009; Michele, 2007).

The aim of this research is to describe and examine the birth experiences of mothers who had their babies at home, alongside those mothers who had their babies in hospitals, using both art and verbal expression. Exposing the subjective meaning of birth, as perceived by women, may contribute to the understanding of personal and feminine aspects of birth, and may help formulate optimal ways of conduct which will take into account the mothers' personal needs and can improve the well-being of the mother and baby. The participants in this research included 5 mothers who gave birth in planned home births with authorized midwives, and 5 mothers who gave birth at hospital, over the past year. The research was conducted according to the qualitative – phenomenological approach and was based upon art work followed by individual interviews. Findings show that mothers who gave birth at home described it as being a safe and empowering experience which they shared with their partners. These participants emphasized the right to choose and feelings of empathy and containment as central factors in a positive experience. The hospital birth experience was usually described as including: loss of control; disengagement from familiar surroundings and from one's body and the event itself, as well as penetrating, alienating medical procedures. In addition, women who had their babies in hospitals also perceived the birth as an empowering experience which they shared with their partners, in situations where they managed to cope with the hospital environment, by operating dissociative mechanisms, amongst other things.

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