

SUMMARY OF YOUNG AND ABORIGINAL: LABOUR AND BIRTH EXPERIENCES OF TEEN MOTHERS IN WINNIPEG

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A new report from PWHCE, *Young and Aboriginal: Labour and Birth Experiences of Teen Mothers in Winnipeg*, explores young Aboriginal mothers' labour and birthing needs and their suggestions for more positive experiences and outcomes. This research builds upon the 2009 PWHCE report, *Young Aboriginal Mothers in Winnipeg*, which discovered that the majority of Aboriginal mothers interviewed felt the birthing experience was frightening.

Aboriginal teen mothers in Winnipeg report having both positive and negative birthing experiences in hospitals. Even for those who prepared themselves for birthing, many reported ageism, racism, and lack of respect for their birthing experience.

Pain during labour, complications, and lack of autonomy over their own birthing were frightening and discouraging. When asked their opinion of hospital staff, the young mothers expressed opinions ranging from friendly and supportive to disrespectful and incomprehensible. Some felt unable to communicate with the nurses due to language barriers, and fear that they were missing important information about their babies. Several of them felt frustrated by conflicting information from nurses and the detachment they observed from doctors. However, others had good experiences with doctors and nurses. One mother shared, "The really nice ones were talking to me, talking to me through my contractions, telling me to breathe and stuff. I would be able to trust some of them. It all depends on how they were". Thus, there is a need for improved communication and information exchange between healthcare professionals and young Aboriginal mothers, according to the needs they have expressed.

Positive factors in birthing included short and uncomplicated deliveries, seeing their baby for the first time, and family support. Participants endeavoured to do what they thought best for their babies, and felt strongly bonded with them.

This project raises questions for future research. For example, what are the stories of young Aboriginal mothers who are required to fly in from northern and remote home communities to birth in Winnipeg? Who is supporting them while they are no longer connected to their families? Are Aboriginal teens aware of and accessing midwifery care and if so, what are their experiences?

Recommendations

Young Aboriginal women identified their need for support and compassion during birthing. Healthcare professionals need to begin by asking them how they feel and what they need.

Given their experiences in hospital settings, the young mothers provided the following advice to other young women as they prepare for labour and birth:

- become acquainted with the maternity ward
- talk to other young mothers so that you don't feel alone
- write a birth plan
- ask for help from maternal health professionals, and tell them what you need and want

Given the unique requirements of young Aboriginal mothers in Winnipeg, we now have an opportunity to act on their expressed needs and to provide more culturally relevant maternity care. By providing culturally sensitive support that meets the needs of young Aboriginal mothers during birthing, healthcare professionals and social services can provide better services to help fulfill young Aboriginal mothers' strong mothering potential.