

Malaysian Chinese Women's Expectations and Lived Experiences of Childbirth

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ABSTRACT

Introduction	Pregnancy and childbirth are considered turning points in women's lives. Women have to adapt too many physiological and psychosocial changes and undergo the stress of childbirth as well. Women's experience of childbirth can bring great impact on her life. Positive birth experience can inspire women's self-confidence and bring about a sense of wellbeing. Socio-cultural values, beliefs and health care system have significant influence on women's expectations and experiences of childbirth. Women's perception and coping manner, caregiver support, labour room management, and obstetric interventions may vary from one country to other due to variations in cultures and practices. Thus, the women's expectations and experiences of childbirth in Malaysia may vary from that in western countries. In view of the scarcity of phenomenological research conducted on women's childbirth experiences in Malaysia, it is therefore of important to conduct this hermeneutic phenomenological research to explore the lived experience of women undergoing childbirth.
Methods	This paper aims to report a phenomenological study conducted to explore the Chinese women's expectations and lived experiences of childbirth in Malaysia. The philosophy of Martin Heidegger underpinned the study. Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with eight criterion-selected Chinese women undergoing childbirth.
Results	Five major themes that illuminated the Chinese women's expectation and experience of childbirth emerged from the study: <i>Being apprehensive about childbirth</i> ; <i>Being enduring of the labour pain</i> ; being supported by the midwives; Being compliant with institutional rules; and being thrown out of the crisis of childbirth. These themes were individually described in great depth from the Heideggerian perspectives.
Conclusions	The study highlights a number of issues in relation to obstetrical and midwifery practices. Besides providing culturally congruent maternity care to women, midwives should also address important childbirth issues such as providing women with a sense of control over their childbirth, improving maternity services, and promoting autonomy in midwifery practices.