



Attitudes of Canadian women toward birthing centres and midwife care for childbirth

Shi Wu Wen, MB, PhD; Leslie S. Mery, MSc; Michael S. Kramer, MD; Vanie Jimenez, MD; Konia Trouton, MD; Pearl Herbert, BN, BEd, MSc; Beverly Chalmers, PhD, DSc(Med)

Interest in home and birthing centre delivery and in midwife care for women at low risk has been growing recently.¹⁻⁴ In the past few years in Canada, several provincial governments have legislated midwife care, and other provinces are considering doing so. However, the appropriateness of these new models of health care delivery remains controversial.¹⁻⁹ Although the desire among women at low risk for natural childbirth has been considered a driving force behind the interest in birthing centre and midwife care,¹⁻⁴ the attitudes of Canadian women towards alternative forms of care and the factors affecting those attitudes are largely unknown. As a first attempt to fill this gap, we analysed data from the 1994 National Population Health Survey for 3438 women aged 20 to 44 years; at the time of the survey, there were 5 687 000 Canadian women in this age group.

The design and methods of the 1994 supplement cycle of the National Population Health Survey have been described in detail elsewhere.¹⁰ All analyses in this article are based on weighted estimations (i.e., for the projected Canadian population, rather than the actual sample). The results are expressed as proportions (or percentages) of eligible female respondents (excluding the 14% of respondents who did not want a child or who did not respond) who answered Yes to the 3 questions about birthing centres and midwife care for childbirth.

Just under one-third of respondents (31%, 95% confidence interval [CI] 28% to 33%) answered Yes to the question "Would you go to a birthing centre, rather than a hospital, to have a baby?" Of these, only two-thirds (71%, 95% CI 71% to 72%), or about 21% of all respondents, said they would allow a nurse or midwife rather than a doctor to deliver the baby. About 85% of the respondents (95% CI 83% to 88%) answered Yes to the question "Would you allow a nurse or midwife rather than a doctor to give postpartum care?" Women who had less education, those who were new immigrants, and those who did not speak English or French were much less likely to answer Yes to all 3 questions (Table 1). In contrast, no strong associations were found between health-related factors and women's acceptance of birthing centres or nurse or midwife care for childbirth (Table 1).

These results demonstrate that a substantial proportion of Canadian women of reproductive age would be willing to deliver at a birthing centre and to receive childbirth and postpartum care from a nurse or midwife. Low education

and social and language difficulties are more important determinants of attitudes towards these alternative forms of care than women's general health status. Our findings may be helpful in planning health care services for pregnant women. To yield more useful information, future surveys should include more detailed questions and should be conducted in communities where birthing centres or nurse or midwife care (or both) have already been implemented.

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Drs. Wen and Trouton are with the Bureau of Reproductive and Child Health and Mr. Mery is with the Cancer Bureau, Laboratory Centre for Disease Control, Health Canada, Ottawa, Ont.; Dr. Kramer is with the Departments of Pediatrics and of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, McGill University, Montreal, Que.; Dr. Jimenez is with the Department of Family Medicine, McGill University, and the Centre de recherche et de formation, Centre local des services communautaires Côte-des-Neiges, Montreal, Que.; Ms. Herbert is with the School of Nursing, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, Nfld.; and Dr. Chalmers is with the Centre for Research in Women's Health, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ont.

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Reprint requests to: Dr. Shi Wu Wen, Bureau of Reproductive and Child Health, Laboratory Centre for Disease Control, Health

Canada, Tunney's Pasture A-L 0601E2, Ottawa ON K1A 0L2; fax 613 941-9927; shi_wu_wen@hc-sc.gc.ca

Table 1: Characteristics of Canadian women with positive attitudes toward birthing centres and nurse or midwife care for childbirth*

Characteristic	Total no. of women (thousands)	Aspect of care; proportion (and 95% CI) of women with positive attitude†		
		Delivery in a birthing centre	Delivery by a nurse or midwife‡	Postpartum care by a nurse or midwife
Province or region of residence				
Atlantic provinces	403	0.27 (0.24–0.30)	0.73 (0.67–0.79)	0.83 (0.79–0.87)
Ontario	1919	0.30 (0.26–0.33)	0.71 (0.65–0.77)	0.89 (0.86–0.93)
Quebec	1103	0.36 (0.31–0.40)	0.69 (0.63–0.76)	0.81 (0.77–0.86)
Western provinces	1414	0.29 (0.26–0.32)	0.74 (0.69–0.79)	0.86 (0.82–0.89)
Age, yr				
20–24	811	0.30 (0.26–0.34)	0.66 (0.58–0.74)	0.83 (0.78–0.88)
25–34	2224	0.30 (0.28–0.33)	0.69 (0.65–0.73)	0.85 (0.82–0.88)
35–44	1804	0.31 (0.28–0.34)	0.77 (0.72–0.81)	0.87 (0.84–0.90)
Household income, \$				
< 20 000	892	0.31 (0.27–0.34)	0.71 (0.65–0.78)	0.80 (0.76–0.85)
20 000 to 40 000	1285	0.27 (0.24–0.30)	0.72 (0.66–0.77)	0.83 (0.79–0.87)
> 40 000	2527	0.33 (0.31–0.36)	0.71 (0.67–0.76)	0.88 (0.86–0.91)
Education				
High school or less	1549	0.23 (0.20–0.26)	0.67 (0.61–0.73)	0.80 (0.76–0.84)
Some post-secondary education	3288	0.34 (0.32–0.36)	0.73 (0.69–0.76)	0.87 (0.85–0.89)
Marital status				
Married or common-law	3340	0.30 (0.28–0.32)	0.70 (0.66–0.74)	0.85 (0.83–0.88)
Other	1499	0.31 (0.29–0.34)	0.74 (0.70–0.79)	0.85 (0.82–0.88)
Immigration status				
Non-immigrant	3913	0.32 (0.30–0.33)	0.72 (0.69–0.75)	0.86 (0.84–0.88)
Immigrant	926	0.26 (0.22–0.31)	0.67 (0.57–0.76)	0.83 (0.76–0.89)
Language				
English or French (or both)	3866	0.32 (0.30–0.34)	0.72 (0.69–0.75)	0.86 (0.84–0.88)
Other	974	0.24 (0.20–0.28)	0.69 (0.60–0.78)	0.79 (0.73–0.85)
Currently pregnant				
No	4622	0.31 (0.29–0.33)	0.72 (0.69–0.75)	0.85 (0.83–0.87)
Yes	212	0.25 (0.18–0.32)	0.57 (0.40–0.73)	0.86 (0.77–0.95)
General health				
Good to excellent	4535	0.31 (0.29–0.33)	0.72 (0.69–0.75)	0.86 (0.84–0.88)
Fair to poor	305	0.27 (0.21–0.34)	0.65 (0.52–0.78)	0.78 (0.69–0.87)
Chronic conditions				
No	2434	0.29 (0.26–0.31)	0.71 (0.67–0.76)	0.85 (0.82–0.87)
Yes, 1 only	1297	0.33 (0.29–0.36)	0.70 (0.64–0.76)	0.88 (0.85–0.91)
Yes, > 1	1108	0.33 (0.29–0.36)	0.73 (0.68–0.79)	0.84 (0.80–0.88)
Height, cm				
< 156	749	0.27 (0.23–0.31)	0.70 (0.61–0.79)	0.80 (0.74–0.86)
156–163	1992	0.30 (0.27–0.33)	0.73 (0.68–0.77)	0.87 (0.84–0.89)
> 163	2098	0.33 (0.30–0.35)	0.71 (0.66–0.75)	0.86 (0.83–0.88)
Admission to hospital in past year				
No	4170	0.30 (0.28–0.32)	0.73 (0.69–0.76)	0.85 (0.83–0.87)
Yes	668	0.34 (0.29–0.38)	0.65 (0.57–0.74)	0.86 (0.81–0.91)

Note: CI = confidence interval.

*Data source: National Population Health Survey, 1994, for 3438 women 20 to 44 years of age. Values presented here are based on weighted estimations for the entire Canadian population (5 687 000 Canadian women at the time of the survey), not just the survey sample; because of missing values and rounding, numbers may not add up to the totals.

†Data represent proportions of women indicating acceptance of these aspects of care.

‡Restricted to women who answered "Yes" to the question "Would you go to a birthing centre, rather than a hospital, to have a baby?"