

Abstract

This thesis addresses the issue of unassisted childbirth from the perspective of medical anthropology, or the anthropology of childbirth. Particular attention is paid to the question of why some women choose to give birth this way, taking into account the (Czech) social and legal context in which this choice is made. The work is based on qualitative research, and draws primarily on in-depth interviews with nine women who have had their own experience of at least one birth without professional medical assistance. The main findings of this thesis are primarily based on thematic data analysis and its interpretation, which identified five main thematic categories: own (emic) conceptualization of childbirth; following one's own needs; distrust of doctors and the bio-medical system; authoritative knowledge; and care during childbirth. The overall overarching theme is women's desire to 'not give away (surrender) their power', which corresponds with their effort to establish and maintain agency within the pregnancy and birth process. In addition to the particular factors that influence the decision of the mothers, the thesis also presents structural barriers that may influence their decision, which is mainly the unavailability of community (certified) midwives, caused to a large extent by the Czech legal regulation of care in home births. In addition, however, the thesis looks in detail at the meanings that birth mothers ascribe to childbirth, how this conceptualization influences the preferred form and conditions of childbirth, or how mothers relate to the maternity care system.