

The Family Birth Story: Use of an ethnographic interview by women's health nursing students

Literature: Support is found in the literature for the value of providing women the opportunities to voice their birth experiences. To describe their birth stories helps women reflect upon and more clearly understand their birth experiences which more fully integrates this intimate experience into their life biographies. Vandevusse (1999) suggests that by attending to women's stories, health-care professionals can examine their influence in creating positive birth experiences, serving as catalyst to examine individual approaches to care and institutional practices. Sandelowski (1991) contends that narrative affords special access to human experience of time, order and change. Savage (2001) states, historically, story-telling served to help learn about and to connect to the beauty of birth. With the recent trend toward viewing birth as a medical event, the birth story offers the unique chance to examine contemporary philosophies.

Objective: Authors sought to promote professional understanding of the nature of birth and to inspire the appreciation of evolving social, cultural, and health-care system influences.

Methods: Guiding questions, based on Leininger's Culture Care Theory, were used to explore cultural care meanings. Narrative analysis allowed patterns/themes to evolve revealing social, cultural, and health-care system influences.

Results: The birth stories reflected on the personal experience of women and their meanings of birth. Also gained were historical perspectives on approaches to care as compared to current clinical practices. The following themes were identified.

Control

Many of the women expressed feelings of distress at the loss, potential or real, of control.

At the same time, the women often deferred to people they perceived to be powerful and knowledgeable (nurses, midwives, physicians).

Family

Involvement of family and friends made a large impact on the perceived outcome of the birth experience.

Care

The perceived care by the nurses and midwives had a large impact on the informant's overall meaning of the birth experience.

Nurses and midwives were most effective in the area of patient education and support.

Conclusion: Inviting women to voice their birth stories contributed to the understanding of the intense, personal nature of birth which helps health-care providers gain insight into women's health expectations and ever-changing health-care systems. Insights into the influence of health-care providers on the life experiences of others are elicited – an appreciation that can build commitment to holistic, humanistic care.