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A Participatory Action Research study exploring women’s understandings of the concept of Informed Choice during pregnancy and childbirth in Ireland

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Abstract

Title: A Participatory Action Research study exploring women’s understandings of the concept of Informed Choice during pregnancy and childbirth in Ireland

Objective: To explore women’s understandings and definitions of the concept of informed choice during pregnancy and childbirth.

Methods: A three-phase action research approach. In the first phase of the study (reported in this paper), fifteen women were interviewed to establish their understandings and experiences of informed choice.

Setting: Dublin, Ireland in a large maternity hospital.

Participants: Fifteen postnatal women who gave birth to a live healthy baby, women attended obstetric or midwifery-led care.

Findings: We found that multiple factors influence how women define informed choice including; their expectations of exercising choice, their sense of responsibility towards their baby, their sense of self and the quality of their relationships with maternity care professionals. The interdependence of the mother-baby relationship deems that in the context of pregnancy and childbirth, women’s definitions, perceptions and experiences of informed choice should be considered to be relational. Women consider that informed choice means more than just the provision of information; rather it requires an in-depth discussion with a professional who is known to them. Women’s understandings reveal that informed choice, is not only defined by but contingent on the quality of women’s relationships with their caregiver and their ability to engage in a process of shared decision-making with them.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>توضیحات</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>