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Investigating Childbirth Choices in a Group of Childfree Women in South Africa

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Abstract

In South Africa women have a variety of choices to consider when faced with birthing decisions, ranging from elective caesarean sections to drug-free vaginal birth at home. While these choices may seem straightforward, there are a range of views and beliefs about the 'ideal' birth influencing women's choices. This study aimed to conduct an in-depth investigation of the views and ideologies surrounding different childbirth choices in a group of childfree women in South Africa, as well as to explore their prospective choices and the reasons behind these choices. The research further aimed to explore how their views regarding different methods of childbirth link to their understanding of motherhood and femininity as well as to common feminist debates on childbirth and motherhood. The sample of this study consisted of 9 female postgraduate students, with ages ranging from 21 to 28, attending the University of the Witwatersrand, who had not yet given birth and were not pregnant at the time this research was conducted. The participants each completed a face-to-face in-depth semi-structured interview. A thematic analysis found four themes which emerged from these interviews, namely anxiety around childbirth, the use of caesarean sections as a point of reference for childbirth choices, childbirth and motherhood and the influence of other women's stories. The findings of this study further revealed that the media and the stories of other women have served as the main sources of information for this group of women concerning different childbirth choices.

Keywords: Childbirth Choices; Motherhood; Childfree; Femininity; Caesarean Section