

# RETHINKING BIRTH PLANS

A SYSTEMATIC, INTEGRATIVE REVIEW INTO THE IMPACT OF BIRTH PLANS ON CHILDBEARING WOMEN



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## BACKGROUND

The birth plan was introduced in the 1980s to increase agency in the face of medicalised birth(1) (2).Forty years on, the birth plan is a heterogeneous document with uncertainty surrounding its impact and effectiveness(3, 4). The terminology of 'birth plan' has been called into question, along with a need to better understand the optimal approach to birth preparation in this context (4). The aim of this review (PROSPERO Ref: CRD42020169338) (5) was to describe the terminology and approaches of birth plans, with the aim of better determining the impact of different approaches to birth plans on childbearing women.

*Keywords: Birth plan, decision making, childbearing women, systematic review, communication*

## RESULTS

Ten articles were identified all of a quantitative nature. The 10 papers represent six countries: Spain(9, 10), USA (11-13), Egypt (14), Israel (15), The Netherlands (16), and Taiwan(17).It is clear that the general purpose of birth plans is communication, with decision making a key factor. The term 'plan' is only used to name the document, with a variety of alternative terms used to describe the content. Even though the approaches of birth planning were varied, having a birth plan was associated with generally positive birth outcomes. Women reporting a high sense of control, satisfaction and expectations being met, also reported effective communication.

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## METHODS

A systematic search and screening of research focused on the impacts of childbirth on women using birth plans was conducted following PRISMA guidelines PRISMA guidelines (6). Data extraction was according to the registered protocol. Using the Crowe Critical Appraisal Tool (7) and a five step integrative approach (8) in analysing the data allowed for diverse inclusion of articles.

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## CONCLUSION

Despite the heterogeneity of birth plans, birth plans demonstrated positive outcomes and impacts, particularly where collaboration, through effective communication, is involved. The act of collaboratively creating a birth plan strengthens knowledge and assists communication and, importantly, aids realistic expectations. Recommendations are made for further research into a universal collaborative and woman-centred approach to birth preparation, with a new term to differentiate this approach from established birth plans.