

THE SOCIAL WORLD OF WOMEN GIVING BIRTH AT HOME
The perspective of sociology of health, illness and medicine

The issue of home births is an interesting and serious social problem in the context of the debate ongoing in Poland for more than twenty years on the condition and quality of perinatal care. Interestingly some women decide to have a child at home in the presence of a midwife without the support of the doctor and hospital medical equipment. Such a practice is a response to an unnecessary interference with the natural course of labor at hospital maternity wards (eg. a routine augmentation, separating mother from the child immediately after birth, forcing a horizontal position).

The survey was conducted on the basis of constructivist version of grounded theory methodology by K. Charmaz (2009), developed in the original version in the '60s by B.G. Glaser and A.L. Strauss and the "theory of social worlds", which the basic principles were defined in the frame of the Chicago school fieldwork. The analysis was based on two sources of data: 16 qualitative interviews with women who gave birth at home, and literature discussing the issue of birth (eg. research reports, laws, regulations).

The result of the research is an integrated set of theoretical concepts that characterize the specificity of "the social world of women giving birth at home" – firstly I distinguish "primary action" (home birth), then I introduce a "network of actors" who are engaged in promoting the idea of home birth and "Trajectory of becoming a participant in a social world" (here I describe the reasons for the decision to give birth at home, the decision-making, organization and preparation stages). In the course of the analysis I also recognized the "arena", which refers to the arguments of supporters and critics of home birth. The most extensive category is the "legitimacy", which explains how the respondents justify and defend their decisions – the most important argument that they use is the assertion that home birth is close to nature and therefore more beneficial than a hospital. Through research I received a rich sociological picture of a piece of social reality, which I described as "social world". I explain how this "world" is created and developed as a coherent whole, which is the opposite of giving birth in hospital.

Luiza Nowakowska