

# **Womens' Decision Making in Pregnancy: The Role of the Internet**

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**ABSTRACT OF THESIS**

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## ABSTRACT

### **Womens' Decision Making in Pregnancy: The Role of the Internet**

**Background:** Pregnant women are turning more and more to the Internet for information during pregnancy. This has the potential to revolutionise client-provider power relationships in the maternity service.

**Aim:** To investigate women's use of the Internet in pregnancy and the effect it has on their decision making and midwifery care.

**Methodology:** An exploratory descriptive design using a multi-method Internet mediated research strategy was employed to provide a coherent and rich picture of pregnant women's use of the Internet in pregnancy. The information seeking process (ISP) model of Carol Kuhlthau (1993) provided the underpinning theoretical framework for the study. Ethical approval was granted from the Office for Research Ethics Committee, Northern Ireland.

In phase one a convenience sample of 303 international midwives completed a web-based questionnaire designed to explore their attitudes, experiences and perceptions of Internet use and whether or not they perceived the Internet affected pregnant women's decision making. Theoretical principles underpinning information seeking behaviour and outcomes from phase one were synthesised to formulate a second web-based questionnaire designed to explore pregnant women's use of the Internet. A convenience sample of 613 international women who were pregnant/had a baby in the previous year participated in the web-based survey. Exploratory, confirmatory online focus groups (n=13) enabled the researcher to confirm the essential theoretical structure of the decision-making processes of pregnant women who seek information from the Internet.

Data synthesis was achieved by employing mixed methods data analysis, using QSR software and SPSS.

**Main Findings:** Midwives recognised that there is an increase in women's use of the Internet as an information source. Midwives do not have the necessary skills to

appraise the quality of information presented to them by women. The Internet facilitates pregnant women to make more informed choices in pregnancy. Women are using the Internet as an accessible source for health information to inform decision-making in pregnancy.

**Implications for Practice:** Midwives' skills in Internet use need to be developed so that they can be effective and competent partners in supporting post-modern women.

**Note:** *Library release of full thesis not publicly available until April 2008*