

This honors thesis seeks to fill a research gap concerning midwifery care for childbearing women. Multiple peer-reviewed studies testify to midwives' outstanding birth outcomes in the care of low-risk women who comprise the majority of the childbearing population. Despite this demonstrated excellence and the fact that births without medical intervention will be normal in 90 - 95% of cases, midwives attended only 8.0% of births in 2008. Perhaps the latter statistic explains why the majority of people, particularly pregnant women, fail to recognize the unique contribution of these trained professionals. Clearly, good statistics on birth outcomes have not significantly increased the use of midwives, thus necessitating a deeper look into the field by allowing midwives' firsthand accounts to reveal the manner in which they provide safe and satisfying birth experiences for childbearing women. My study highlights the importance of midwives as members of the childbearing team in Vermont (and nationally). The research comprises ten interviews—five with certified professional midwives (CPMs) who attend home births and five with certified nurse-midwives (CNMs) who attend hospital births. Thus, I explore the same profession in two different settings, a strategy that allows me to compare and contrast different birthplaces and different types of midwives. Additionally, the project attempts to answer demographic questions: What is distinctive about midwifery care in a small, largely rural northeastern state; and does Vermont's healthcare model contribute to safe and effective midwifery practice? By going beyond birth statistics and listening to the midwives themselves (their successes, needs, and desires), I hope to contribute to improving policies and protocols that affect midwives and their clients in Vermont. I also hope to help bring midwifery care to the attention of Vermonter families; specifically, women giving birth should have genuine knowledge of choices—both regarding the caregiver and the place of birth.