HOME BIRTH STATISTICS - 1986

The 1986 home birth figures are below, with statistics for earlier years as published in previous National Newsletters. Since these earlier figures were published I have recieved additional forms for previous years but have not re-analysed the earlier data. The number of births I have a record of since 1982 is shown below. All years are calendar years. Where information was missing for particular items, the statistics are of those births for which the information was known.

YEAR		1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Births now on record		216	264	362	365	486
Births analysed			183	315	315	486
Variable				percentages		
Parity (previous live births)	0		23.8	21.4	29.7	31.3
	1		29.8	37.5	33.0	28.7
	2		32.0	25.0	24.1	23.5
	3		8.8	10.3	6.3	11.1
	4		3.9	3.6	4.0	2.7
	5		1.7	1.8	1.3	2.1
	6		0	0.4	1.0	0.2
	7		0	0	0	0.2
	8		0	0	0.3	0
	9		0	0	0.3	0.2
Stable relationship			93.9	92.6	93.3	93.1
Smoker			5.8	6.8	6.5	4.6
Anti-D given			14.4	11.7	12.3	10.6
Iron tablets taken			24.2	22.5	24.2	24.1
Raspberry leaf taken			75.1	75.9	63.8	70.9
Maternal transfer to hospital (intra- and post-partum)			6.6	15.3	12.9	26.1
Pain relieving drugs used			5.1	2.9	4.7	10.0
Acupuncture performed			28.2	12.4	15.9	14.2
Ecbolics given			14.1	18.4	9.9	19.8
Blood loss:	less than 300 mls		74.7	76.6	75.0	78.0
	300 to 600 mls		19.5	19.8	21.9	16.0
	more than 600 mls		5.7	3.6	3.1	6.0
Episiotomy			5.7	4.5	3.6	6.6
Sutured laceration			29.9	28.9	30.7	29.5
Membranes ruptured spontaneously			78.9	81.7	85.7	81.1
Resuscitation needed (for baby)			0.6	5.1	5.3	4.9
Sex of baby - boys			49.2	54.9	51.2	52.4
- girls			50.8	45.1	48.8	47.6
Breast feeding established			98.8	99.0	98.7	98.7
Infant transfer			2.9	3.3	3.4	5.6
Maternal conditions -						
hypertension during labour			4.3	6.3	4.1	5.8
uterine dysfunction			2.2	2.5	1.6	3.3
cord prolapse			0	0	0	0
malpresentation			0.5	0.6	2.9	2.1
pop delivery			0.5	1.6	1.9	1.4
shoulder dystocia			1.6	2.9	1.9	3.3
retained placenta			0.5	1.0	1.0	0.8
mastitis			4.9	8.3	3.5	5.8
other maternal infection			2.7	3.2	1.9	2.1
post natal depression			3.3	5.7	2.2	2.1

STATISTICS (continued)

Variable	1983	1984	1985	1986
	percentages			
Foetal conditions -				
foetal distress	2.7	1.3	1.6	2.3
meconium staining	9.8	6.7	8.3	9.3
intra partum or neonatal death (1)	0	0	0	0.4
dysmaturity	0	0.6	1.6	0.4
foetal abnormality	3.3	1.6	1.0	1.9
birth injury	1.1	1.0	1.0	1.4
infection	8.2	6.0	7.9	8.4
jaundice	30.1	32.7	30.8	29.8
pleasure responses	49.7	30.2	44.1	33.7
Apgar score, at 1 minute: 9 and 10	68.8	72.6	72.1	71.0
at 5 minutes: 9 and 10	98.3	97.8	95.3	97.5
Maternal transfer to hospital of mothers having first baby (parity 0)	6.7	38.2	30.6	50.0
Maternal transfer of mothers having subsequent babies	7.1	9.7	7.6	11.1
	numbers			
Average age of mothers (years)	28.6	28.7	29.5	29.5
Minimum age of mothers (years)	20	17	20	18
Maximum age of mothers (years)	41	40	42	43
Average length of -				
first stage of labour (hours)	6.8	7.1	7.7	8.0
2nd stage of labour (hours)	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6
3rd stage of labour (minutes)	11.6	14.8	15.2	13.6
Average birth weight of babies (gms)	3578	3608	3576	3620
Average discharge weight (gms)	3849	3935	3846	3900

(1) In addition to the two deaths recorded in 1986 (0.4%), forms have been received for three deaths in 1982. These were not previously recorded in the 1982 figures.

It will be noticed that there is a large increase in the percentage of maternal transfers to hospital (see previous page) and this is particularly marked in primiparas (see above). This is largely because one midwife performed almost all of her deliveries in the home-like environment of a 'birthing room' at a hospital. In particular there was at the time no G.P. who accepted primiparas for home birth so all of these delivered in hospital. These hospital deliveries were also -possibly coincidentally - responsible for some of the increase in use of pain relieving drugs and number of episiotomies. The statistics form in use in 1986 did not distinguish between intended and unintended hospital birth so a planned hospital birth could not be kept separate from a transfer for assistance. The new home birth form which commenced use in 1987 does make that distinction.

HOME AND HOSPITAL DELIVERY.

A major concern people have about home birth is safety. Ample births have now been analysed to clearly show that home birth has a very good safety record and low rate of complications. However these figures cannot in themselves directly answer the question whether home birth is more or less safe than hospital delivery. The reason is that home birth candidates are a low risk group and so a lower rate of problems is to be expected. Only adequate scientific studies comparing like groups can properly make this judgement. Fortunately these are available and do not support the idea that domiciliary delivery is dangerous.

What these figures do illustrate is a different quality of birth, particularly in relation to intervention and complications. The preceding tables include the outcomes of those who transferred to hospital, and so intervention rates are higher than for those who stayed at home. To look at intervention rates for these latter, I extracted from all 1747 cases on computer the 1510 who delivered at home. Of these, 99.3% had no pain relief. Only 1.6% had an episiotomy and only 27.8% had stitches. In 84.0% the membrane ruptured spontaneously, 15.9% artificially. (The mathematically astute may notice 0.1% missing - this one person had two membranes. One ruptured naturally, one not. Count that how you like.)

These figures cannot be compared to hospital practice because intervention in this respect is so common it is not recorded. However I took a leaf out of Joan Donley's book (Save the Midwife, page 79) and updated figures on intervention. The latest Health Department data is for 1985:

	Forceps or vacuum Extraction	Caesarian Sections	Total Abnormal	Total Births
Number	7333	5376	12709	52060
% of total births	14.1	10.3	24.4	

In contrast, for those who deliver at home birth is permitted to take place at its own pace:

Stage 1 time (completed hours):	<1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Births	36	95	136	163	175	166	139	114	88	57	80	46	38	32	32	21
hours	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	30	36	41
births	10	15	7	7	6	2	3	1	6	1	8	2	1	1	1	1

(length of stage one was unknown for 20 deliveries.)

Time (minutes)	Births Stage 2	Births Stage 3	Time (hrs & mins)	Births Stage 2	Births Stage 3
1 to 5	132	227	1.01-1.15	57	12
6 to 10	221	575	1.16-1.30	52	2
11 to 15	220	323	1.31-1.45	21	3
16 to 20	180	135	1.46-2.00	27	3
21 to 25	121	61	2.01-2.15	10	0
26 to 30	122	61	2.16-2.30	8	1
31 to 35	77	27	2.31-2.45	5	1
36 to 40	56	16	2.46-3.00	5	2
41 to 45	48	21	3.01-4.00	4	1
46 to 50	46	2	4.01-5.00	1	1
51 to 55	27	4			
56 to 60	45	9	Time unknown	25	23

One final figure. Of these women, 98.4% breast fed their babies, 1.1% supplemented, and 0.5% used bottle feeding.

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