Childbirth In The Eipo, Wogeo Essay, Research Paper

Childbirth practices vary among all cultures. Some of the differences are quite extreme and obvious whereas others are decidedly more subtle. Despite the apparent differences, there are also similarities inherent in the beliefs about, approaches to and methods of giving birth. Some child bearing customs among American women, Wogeo women and Eipo women are clearly unique to their respective cultures but most are representative of fundamental similarities.

Women from all three cultures typically go some place outside the home to give birth. Consequently, the delivery of a baby becomes more of a public event than a private event. Eipo women go to a hut, usually built on the outskirts of the village, during menstruation, illness and childbirth. Wogeo women bear their young on a nearby beach and then continue to spend a certain amount of time away from home (until they are ritually clean) in a small hut following the delivery. Most American women also experience the birthing process away from home in either hospitals or birthing centers.

Eipo, Wogeo and American women evidently also recognize the importance of having supporters and assistants present throughout the stages of labor and delivery. Expectant women in each of these societies are usually surrounded by persons who are experienced in childbirth procedures, and are therefore able to provide comfort and support as well as perform necessary interventions. Eipo and Wogeo women are usually attended to by female relatives. These attendants might assist the pregnant woman by ensuring that there are enough clean leaves for her to deliver on or by suggesting birthing positions that will facilitate the delivery. American women are typically surrounded by numerous assistants and supporters during labor and birth. The father of the child is often present and a team of doctors, nurses, midwives, anesthesiologists, etc. are often present to support the mother-to-be during childbirth.

Women in each of the cultures adhere to certain practices, beliefs and/or taboos relative to their cultural context. For instance, an Eipo woman gives birth to her baby, briefly determines the gender of the child, and then massages her abdomen and says prayers to ensure the delivery of the placenta. The after birth must be delivered before the umbilical cord is cut and before the baby is attended to. Furthermore, Eipo newborns are washed only with leaves and never with water. American women believe that the position of the fetus during prenatal development will predict the sex of the child. If a mother carries high she will deliver a girl. Conversely if she carries low she will give birth to a boy. After a Wogeo women becomes ritually clean again, she returns to the village to present her infant to the headman of her husband s clan. The headman casts specific spells that are necessary for the child s future health and strength. Shortly thereafter, the mother will also give the umbilical cord to a person who is about to travel some distance out to sea with the instruction that he/she must throw it over board. This is customary practice because the Wogeo believe that the child s chances of growing tall and strong will increase if the ritual is carried out.

American, Wogeo and Eipo women also have established practices for the involvement of spiritual leaders/healers in the birthing process, should they choose to involve them. For example, if an American woman is giving birth in a hospital she can usually request a visit from the hospital s chaplain and he/she might say a prayer in an attempt to ease or expedite the birth. During long and/or difficult labors in both Eipo and Wogeo cultures, women may call upon spiritual healers or specialists to perform rituals, say prayers or cast spells in order to speed delivery.

Additionally, men also play important roles in childbirth in the Eipo, the Wogeo and the American societies. A Wogeo father for example will assist the delivery by carefully adhering to specific rituals and beliefs such as making sure that all knots in the house are untied and all boxes are open. The father must also not engage in violent exercise and he should avoid all contact with certain weapons and tools, specifically axes, arrows and knives. Both Eipo and Wogeo men act as the spiritual healers within their cultures as well and are frequently called upon to assist with childbirth at critical junctures or during emergencies. American fathers are often involved at every stage of pregnancy. For instance, men will generally accompany women to obstetrical appointments, they will participate in labor coaching/ Lamaze classes and will usually participate in the actual labor and delivery in some way (i.e. cutting the umbilical cord). American men also serve as nurses, doctors, midwives, etc. and are therefore also essential in that capacity to the childbirth process.

Aside from the above-mentioned similarities, there are obvious differences between the American birth process and the two New Guinean birth processes relative to medical technology, prenatal nutrition and care and child birth classes, just to cite a few. Most of the American techniques seem superior except for one: the position of the mother during labor and delivery. The majority of American women give birth from a supine position whereas Eipo and Wogeo women appear to give birth from a standing or vertical position. Research has shown that a relatively vertical birth position actually decreases the amount of time that a woman spends in labor because pushing is easier and therefore more effective (Berk, 2000).

Another difference observed between the American birth process and the birth processes of the Wogeo and Eipo is that American women deliver their infants and generally relinquish the care of their babies for a period of time immediately following the birth. This period of time varies in length among women depending upon a number of factors such as the medical condition of the neonate after delivery as well as the condition of the mother after delivery. Eipo and Wogeo women are left largely to themselves to provide for their infants as well as their own needs and welfare.

When American babies are born, parents are charged with the difficult task of naming the infant. The process of selecting a name for a baby often starts well before the birth of the baby as parents float and discuss certain names and consult books of baby names for options. Wogeo babies are named by their relatives in a formal naming ceremony. At this ceremony, an infant s relatives will speak the names of their ancestors and decide upon one that sounds right.

Finally, Eipo women specifically regard child bearing and rearing as one of their primary contributions to society. Unmarried women who become pregnant are not stigmatized, most women have numerous children and all women become witnesses to and participants in the childbirth process prior to bearing children themselves. As a result, Eipo women are more prepared for childbirth than American women. In contrast, American women view their infants as extensions of themselves rather than societal contributions. American women are also characterized as promiscuous if they have children before marriage and most American women give birth for the first time without ever having observed or been involved with the birth process.

While it is clear that these three societies are markedly different on many levels, the parallels and similarities belie the concept that those differences are more significant, more prevalent than the similarities. Essentially, the biological and physiological components of childbirth dictate that certain responses will correspond intrinsically among cultures. However, the uniqueness of individual reactivity will perpetuate distinction between different societies and will compel us to constantly alter our perceptions of difference and similarity.