

# Maternity healthcare professionals perspectives of decision-making in the UK: a qualitative study.

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## Abstract

**Objective** To explore and characterise maternity healthcare professionals' (MHCPs) experience and practice of informed decision-making (IDM), to inform policy, research and practice development. **Design** Qualitative focus group study. **Setting** Online with MHCPs from a single maternity unit in the Southwest of England. **Population** MHCPs who give information relating to clinical procedures and pregnancy care and are directly involved in decision-making conversations purposively sampled from a single National Health Service (NHS) Trust. **Data collection:** A semi-structured topic guide was used. **Data Analysis:** Reflexive thematic analysis. **Results** Twenty-four participants attended seven focus groups. Two themes were developed: *contextualising decision-making* and *controversies in current decision-making*. Contextual factors that influenced decision-making practices included lack of time, and challenges faced in intrapartum care. MHCPs reported variation in how they approach decision-making conversations and asked for more training on how to consistently achieve IDM. There were communication challenges with women/birthing people who do not speak English. Three controversies were explored in the controversies theme: the role of prior clinical experience, the validity of informed consent when women/birthing people were in pain and during emergencies, and instances where women/birthing people declined medical advice. **Conclusions** We found that MHCPs are committed to IDM but need better support to deliver it consistently. Structured processes including core information sets, communication skills training and the decision support aids may help to standardise the information and better support IDM.

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