

## UC research examines home births -- then and now

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Early photo of HOME members and founders. At left are early members Sandy Schildroth and Tina Long. At far right are founders Fran Ventre and Esther Herman.

A comparison of home-birth trends of the 1970s finds many similarities – and some differences – related to current trends in home births.

For instance, in the 1970s – as now – women opting to engage in home births tended to have higher levels of education. That's according to a 1978 survey by Home Oriented Maternity Experience (HOME) that was recently found by University of Cincinnati historian Wendy Kline in the archives of the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG).

That survey showed that in the late 1970s, one third of the group's members participating in home births had a bachelor's, master's or

doctoral degree. Fewer than one percent did not have a high school education.

Also, according to the 2,000 respondents to HOME's 1978 survey, 36 percent of women engaging in home births at the time were attended by physicians. That is a much higher percentage than is the case currently for mothers participating in home births. (In research by Eugene Declerq, Boston University School of Public Health, and Mairi Breen Rothman, Metro Area Midwives and Allied Services, it was found that about five percent of homebirths were attended by a physician in 2008.)

These comparisons are possible because of historical information found by UC's Kline, including "A Survey of Current Trends in Home Birth" by the founders HOME and published in 1979.

Kline is also conducting interviews with and has obtained historical documents from the founders of and the midwives first associated with HOME, a grass roots organization founded in 1974, to provide information and education related to home births

Kline will present this research and related historical information as one of only nine international presenters invited to the "Communicating Reproduction" conference at Cambridge University Dec. 6-7.

The debate surrounding health, safety and home births rose to national prominence as recently as October 2011 during the Home Birth Consensus Summit in Virginia, held because of increasing interest in home births as an option for expectant mothers.

Overall, Kline's research of HOME and of ACOG counters the stereotypical view of the 1970s [home-birth](#) movement as countercultural and peopled by "hippies." In fact, the founders of HOME deliberately reached out to a broad cross section of women across the political and

religious spectrum, including religious conservatives as well as those on the left of the political spectrum.

Said Kline, “In looking through the historical record, we find that many women involved in home births in the 1970s signed their names ‘Mrs. Robert Smith’ or ‘Mrs. William Hoffman.’ The movement included professionals, business people, farmers, laborers and artists. It defies simplistic categorization.”

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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