

# Researchers say concealed pregnancies persist and have not been relegated to the era of the Mother and Baby Homes

June 26 2014, by Yolanda Kennedy

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A major research programme by academics in the School of Nursing and Midwifery, Trinity College Dublin, will explore the experience of concealed pregnancy in contemporary Ireland. They hope the research findings will ensure these women's voices are heard and that policy can be shaped to respond appropriately to their needs. The researchers wish to speak to women who are currently keeping their pregnancy secret or have hidden a pregnancy in the past.

Researchers and experienced midwives, Sylvia Murphy Tighe, HRB Fellow and Midwifery Doctoral Student and Professor Joan Lalor, Associate Professor from the School of Nursing and Midwifery in Trinity have said that despite a popular belief that concealed pregnancies are a thing of the past from the era of the mother and baby homes, they are in fact an ongoing situation for many [women](#) in Ireland today. They believe this is a situation that still needs our attention and understanding.

A concealed or hidden [pregnancy](#) is a situation where a woman hides her pregnancy and keeps it secret from her family and social network. This can lead to delayed or no antenatal care, negative health outcomes or tragic consequences such as maternal or neonatal death.

Various research studies in Ireland along with the experiences of health professionals such as GPs, social workers, and crisis pregnancy counsellors, show that many women in Ireland continue to conceal their

pregnancies for a variety of reasons. These studies have placed the numbers of concealed pregnancies between 1 in 403 (rural Ireland) and 1 in 625 cases (Dublin) where the pregnancy has been concealed up to 20 weeks. A 2012 case control study by the National University of Ireland, Galway found the prevalence rate even higher at 1 in 148 cases up to 20 weeks gestation.

Speaking about concealed pregnancies in Ireland, Ms Murphy Tighe said: "Many women and children suffered in the past from their experiences of mother and baby homes and other negative societal and familial responses to pregnancy. However, women are still keeping pregnancies secret in Ireland today and we need to get an understanding of the complex reasons behind this phenomenon so that we can respond more effectively."

Ms Murphy Tighe described the broad profile of women who conceal pregnancies: "There may be a sense in society that only teenagers conceal pregnancies. However, our research and the experience of midwives, social workers and GPs have confirmed that women of all ages, including older women and women within and outside of relationships may keep their pregnancy secret."

"The reasons for concealment vary widely and can include financial concerns, cultural and/or religious influences, power and dynamics in the relationship, domestic abuse, the lack of a partner or boyfriend, parental opinion and age," she continued.

Speaking about the needs of women who conceal pregnancies Professor Lalor said: "We know that a concealed pregnancy can be a difficult experience and sensitive time for the woman concerned. Despite guidelines there is a need for care pathways for women who wish to keep their pregnancy secret whilst also being able to access support and antenatal care. For too long healthcare professionals have shaped policy.

It is now time to hear the voices and experiences of women so we can respond more effectively, help shape policy and assist in the development of care pathways for women in Ireland today."

Ms Tighe Murphy is appealing to women who have concealed a pregnancy in the past or who are currently keeping their pregnancy a secret to come forward and share their story. The research team would like to reassure women that all enquiries will be treated sensitively and in confidence. Sylvia Murphy Tighe can be contacted by email at [smurphyt@tcd.ie](mailto:smurphyt@tcd.ie) or call/text 087-9817340.

Provided by Trinity College Dublin

Citation: Researchers say concealed pregnancies persist and have not been relegated to the era of the Mother and Baby Homes (2014, June 26) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-06-concealed-pregnancies-persist-relegated-era.html>

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