



Info-paper

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How Active Birth could affect Thailand.

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Introduction.

In the following I will try to give my opinion on what I think the benefits for Thailand could be resulting from the introduction of the Active Birth concept (as developed by Janet Balaskas) as a standard in government hospitals.

Active Birth.

Active Birth is the concept where mobility of the pregnant woman is used as a way to facilitate birth of her child. There are no standard positions, the only standard being that the woman chooses her own position in all stages of labor, and thus the caregivers adapt to the pregnant woman, and not otherwise. To obtain optimal mobility hinders as intravenous or bed bound immobilized concepts such as lying down in the supine position or in the lithotomy position are put aside as a standard. Immobilized birth using the supine position as early as possible will be referred to as Passive Birth by the author.

Another essential in Active Birth is the fact that the woman is informed about the way a delivery usually takes place. Through some training hours she knows the difference between false labor and real labor, she knows that a first child will take much longer than a second child, she knows the difference between a mucus plug coming out and water breaking, she understands about frequency and duration of labor, in

other words, she is informed about the labor process and therefore will not show up at the labor room much too soon. She is also informed about how things will go in the labor room once the time is there, and her usual support person (be it the Doula, the partner, a sister, or all 3) will be there with her.

Advantages of Active Birth vs Passive Birth.

Active Birth increases the chances for a birth to be a Natural birth versus a C-section (which are known to increase the risk of Obesity, Asthma, Allergies and Immune Deficiencies, but also Autism). It also increases the chances for the fetus to be expelled naturally without the use of forceps or ventouse (vacuum extraction) that usually do more damage to the fetus (examples of damage are: skull fracture, retinal hemorrhages, brachial plexus, brain hemorrhages, cerebral palsy, that can lead to paralysis, intellectual disability, and possibly death) than a natural journey through the woman's birth canal. It tends to give the woman a reassuring experience increasing her self-confidence in many ways (body, mind), increasing the love for her baby, and increasing the bond between her and her support person (the husband).

With the use of gravity and mobility during stage 1 and stage 2 of the birth process, the fetus travels better and faster through the birth canal and is expelled more easily. Because no intravenous (which affects the free mobility) with drugs or fluid is administered, the natural flow and flow timing of hormones (estrogen, progesterone, oxytocin, beta-endorphins, prolactin, epinephrine, norepinephrine) is undisturbed, and pain is reduced through the natural endorphins the body makes at the time this is necessary. This flow of hormones and the travel through the birth canal are essential (lung preparation, immune system of the baby [the micro biome found in the vaginal fluid helps baby's immune system and reduces risks of Autism] for the health and well-being of the fetus.

Active Birth is a family centered approach, and so it includes the pregnant woman, but also the partner of the woman. The woman is respected in her choices (oxytocin yes or no, can eat or drink whenever she wants, can have the support of her partner if she wants, can give birth in the position that she wants) This is different from a caregiver approach where basically things are made as convenient as possible for the caregiver being the doctors and nurses. For many hospitals this is an easier way, as a routine delivery process can be thought out, where the patient is immobilized in a supine or lithotomy position, and the whole process is more time efficient. All complications coming from the supine or lithotomy position are then also dealt with in a routine medical way that have no major impact on the time efficiency of birth. Having the husband around in a caregiver

approach is a disturbing factor that is impermissible. Labor is treated as a medical intervention, such as heart surgery, bile extraction, kidney stone removal or any other medical intervention, so IV is standart, supine position is mandatory, caregivers are leading and relatives are kept outside, which makes good sense for medical interventions. But birth is a natural event that unfortunately has been transformed into a medical intervention, and the price for this is high.

Disadvantages of Active Birth.

Phu-yai / Phu-noi: Because Active Birth is a women centered approach to giving birth, the caregiver is expected to take a background role and to be more a listener. This is not easy in cultures with a Phu-yai Phu-noi tradition, where the Phu-noi is the younger, the less-educated, hence the woman giving birth in a government hospital, and the caregiver (doctor or nurse) is the Phu-yai. It feels very unnatural to change this around temporarily, eventhough the benefits for the pregnant woman's health and well being and for the baby's health and wellbeing may be considerable. The woman centered approach in Active Birth may not work in a hierarchical society, and high levels of obesity, asthma, allergies and immune deficiencies, combined with low levels of fertility and short couple-life may be the price to pay for keeping birth withing this hierarchical structure.

One disadvantage is that with Active Birth the caregiver most probably will go against his natural instinct of being the leader, the decision maker to being the follower and supporter.

Overcrowded and understaffed: Anybody who can possibly afford it will try to divert to private clinics and private hospitals. There, the availability of nurses is high, time is taken, and waiting time is low, but the price is high. Unfortunately some 60% of the population do not have the financial means for this. They basically end up in government hospitals. Nurses there do not have time to train pregnant women, doctors are busy on all fronts. Active Birth implies training pregnant women, not only about ANC issues (such as folium supplements, iodine, calcium, counting the baby's movement after meals, etc. which are all very important by the way), but also inform the pregnant woman what she will encounter in the LR, who will be there, when she should go there (not too soon), what to bring (food, drinks, etc.), who to bring, who not to bring, inform her of the choices that she has, explain pros- and cons of Natural birth, mobility, C-section, etc. This would reduce the famous fear-tension-pain cycle that comes from lack of information of events to come. The latter is usually not possible. It remains a mystery for the pregnant woman up to the day she enters the labor room forcibly alone.

Benefits of Active Birth?

There are many benefits, short term and medium-long term resulting from the introduction of Active Birth. Benefits can be categorized in health benefits, social benefits and financial benefits.. In the following table a few thought benefits are presented.

	Short term	Medium-long term
Social	The husband having been involved through the complete process of pregnancy including birth has a much tighter bond with his partner. The mother having been able to give birth herself feels much better about herself, more confident, and more happy with her baby, as the suffering is less.	The couple having experienced birth together will feel this as an ordeal they have passed together, and this is bonding. Also, delivery has not been seen as a moment of great suffering by the woman, so she is more open to new pregnancies and sexual exchange with her partner. The couple is more motivated to have children which will positively influence the fertility rate of a country. The nuclear family is the building block for society. From this is formed the extended family, the village, the city and the country. Strength of the nuclear family is formed by good health, good communication between husband and wife, love between husband, wife and child. Active Birth will have a positive influence on the latter.
Health	Less problems with health for the woman, less need for C-sections, less risk from assisted deliveries, stronger babies healthwise, less asthma, less obesitas, etc. Breastmilk more likely to be available with natural birth, then with any other kind of birth. C-sections are known to raise the level of Autism by 21%	C-sections are known to raise the level of Autism by 21%. Passive Birth (where the woman is in the supine or lithotomy position) more frequently lead to C-sections. C-sections raise the chance for Autism. Autism is a short term, medium term and long term affect of not introducing Active Birth. Problems of Asthma, Obesitas, etc. are also reduced through Active Birth.
Financial	The lower the rate of interventions during birth the cheaper birth is to the government hospital. The less C-sections the cheaper. The rate of interventions in passive birth is higher then that in active birth. All complication following intervention will be expensive for the government hospital, and so avoiding them as much as possible makes good sense. Active Birth is known to help with breast milk production. The baby will therefore not have to be fed with expensive milk powder.	Autism, Asthma, Gut problems, immune deficiency and all other medium term health issues are costly to government hospitals. Avoiding them as much as possible through the introduction of Active Birth as a standart will have a saving impact on government spending.

Quantitative Research with Cost-Benefit Analysis.

Seeing that the benefits are so numerous, this would justify a more qualitative study including a cost-benefit analysis specific to the situation in Thailand.

Also, the doula is something that we see in western societies, and the introduction of such a system, which is now virtually non-existing in Thailand, could very well alleviate the work load of nurses as well as form a continuous support through the complete pregnancy including delivery if the doula would be introduced into the labor room.

The nuclear family being the building block of any society, the solidity of this nuclear family has direct implications for the solidity of the society as a whole. Active Birth is known to enhance the solidity of the nuclear family, and to reduce health problems both for mothers and infants, and therefore may very well be the logical way forward in all government hospital settings.