

**MATERNAL HEALTH-SEEKING
BEHAVIOUR: A QUALITATIVE
RESEARCH PROJECT.**

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I, **Robyn Johnston**, declare that this thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Health at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

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Acknowledgment

When we begin journeys the nervous anticipation of what lies ahead, the new discoveries and the new friends can quickly turn to trepidation if things don't quite go as anticipated. But if you are surrounded by supportive, reassuring others who encourage you to keep going, you can make it through and those moments of trepidation will be replaced by the joy of accomplishment. While this analogy could relate to different situations, in this instance it describes my doctoral research studies and I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the people who supported me through the past years.

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Abstract

Aim:

This study explored the health-seeking behaviours contained in the stories of 14 first-time mothers during the first twelve months of their infant's life when they were concerned for their child's health. The aim of this study was to understand how first-time mothers learn to seek help or advice and how, through this learning, increase their knowledge and health literacy.

It is anticipated that the results of the study will assist health professionals to develop strategies to support mothers, especially first-time mothers, to increase their knowledge and enable them to make informed decisions regarding health-seeking for their baby.

Method:

A qualitative design was chosen to allow an exploration of the mothers' health-seeking experiences using the Critical Incident Technique method to inform the data collection. This method allowed the mothers to be observers of their actions through the diarising of times when they had concerns about their child's health. The mothers' stories were then explored using semi-structured interviews, when the babies were around eight weeks of age and again at approximately six to eleven months of age. An inductive thematic analysis method was then used in the analysis of the mothers' stories to ensure their stories were respected and their use maximised.

Results:

Analysis of the 124 health-seeking occurrences identified in the mothers' stories resulted in the development of four themes and associated subthemes. These themes were: asking other parents, connecting with health professionals, e-searching and learning, and state of knowing. This research project demonstrated that mothers seek help or advice within their environment

in what could be described as a health literacy pathway. The mothers were able to increase their health literacy through a reciprocal interaction with their environment that included health services where the presence of a collaborative relationship enabled the co-production of knowledge. A key feature of the study findings was the role of mothers' groups in providing opportunity for knowledge generation through the observation of modelled behaviour, especially from other mothers with children of a similar age.

Conclusion:

This study demonstrated that mothers who participated in this study did not ignore health concerns but are motivated learners actively seeking help or advice through a number of different avenues, often soon after birth. In addition, mothers access several different sources for the one issue and when provided with information will critique it before accepting or actioning. Importantly, the study demonstrated also that over time where and how mothers seek help or advice changes as they become connected with their community and their self-efficacy increases.