

**Factors that contribute to midwives staying in
midwifery: a study in one Area Health Service in
NSW**

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admission to the degree of Masters (Honours) of Midwifery**

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part or requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparations of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AHMC	Australian Health Ministers Conference
AHWAC	Australian Health Workforce Advisory Committee
AHS	Area Health Service
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
CMCFH	The Centre for Midwifery, Child and Family Health
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
FNMH	Faculty of Nursing, Midwifery and Health
MGP	Midwifery Group Practice
NHWT	National Health Workforce Taskforce
NSCCAHS	Northern Sydney Central Coast Area Health Service
NSW	New South Wales
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
UTS	University of Technology, Sydney

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate the factors that contribute to midwives in one Area Health Service in New South Wales (NSW), Australia, staying in midwifery. The study was set in the Northern Sydney Central Coast Area Health Service (NSCCAHS), Australia.

A descriptive design underpinned the research. The study was conducted over two phases. Phase One involved focus groups to assess the suitability of a questionnaire for the Australian setting. The questionnaire was previously used in similar research in England. Phase Two was the distribution of the questionnaire and analysis of the data obtained. Both qualitative and quantitative data were obtained in the research, though most data were quantitative in nature. The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics while content analysis was used on the qualitative data.

The study sample consisted of midwives working within NSCCAHS who were employed full-time, part-time or on a casual basis. A total of 392 midwives were surveyed with a response rate of 53% (n=209).

The results provided information on the factors which contribute to midwives staying in midwifery. The top three factors identified for midwives staying in midwifery were: relationships with women, professional identity as a midwife and the practice of midwifery.

This study has implications for Area Health Services and Health Departments in Australia. If midwifery workforce shortages are to be improved Area Health Services and Health

Departments must examine the way in which care is organised and ensure support systems are in place to support advantageous models of care and the midwives who work within them.

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Lastly I wish to acknowledge the midwives who completed this research. At the time in which this study was conducted, midwives within this Area Health Service were feeling the pressures associated with an increasing workload and decreasing staffing levels. For many of the midwives they felt that this was just another form for them to fill in and that nothing would be done as a result of it. I hope those midwives will not be able to say “I told you so” and that instead something is done about the recruitment and retention of midwives. I have read countless accounts of why midwives stay in midwifery; where they get their job satisfaction from and why they would or would not recommend midwifery to others. There were days when I would become extremely depressed as a result of the stories I was hearing. At the times when the negative and extremely sad stories got too much I changed to the positive ones and the encouraging quotes midwives gave about their work. While these positive stories really inspired me, there was one that did so more than any other. This research tells you why midwives in this Area Health Service stay in midwifery, let me share with you the quote that kept me going throughout this extremely rewarding, but sometimes difficult journey:

“The energy of women and birth is like nothing else and to be part of this is truly special. It does continue to retain a certain mysticism and autonomy, to be a true midwife”.