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Renaissance for home births as US mothers plump for cheaper option



Sarah Sandidge said her second birth, at home, was amazing Janae Hardy

It is one of the world’s most interventionist maternity systems, with more than a third of women having Caesarean sections rather than natural births.

Now, American women wanting to avoid the culture of medical intervention in hospital are choosing to stay away in record numbers.

With 32.8 per cent of women now having C-sections compared with just 4.5 per cent in 1965, the number of mothers in the US having out-of- hospital births has also reached a record high, with 54,635 deliveries, the vast majority of which were carried out at home. It is the highest rate since 1975.

Although the proportion of out-of-hospital births remains small overall at 1.36 per cent, researchers note that the figures are not trivial.

“These are not small numbers in an absolute sense,” said Marian MacDorman, co-author of the report from the National Centre for Health Statistics. A key factor driving the trend is concerns about high levels of intervention in US hospitals. “Women are trying to avoid unnecessary intervention. In the US, one in three births are delivered by Caesarean. There are also high rates for induction of labour and other kind of intervention,” said Ms MacDorman.

After a stressful first labour in hospital, Sarah Sandidge opted to stay at home for her second. “It was amazing. I remember every detail of his birth,” said Mrs Sandidge, 34, recounting the delivery of her son, Diesel, by a midwife at her home. “I don’t really remember having that with my daughter’s birth because it was just so stressful.”

The high cost of birth in American hospitals, is another factor, with a vaginal delivery typically costing \$15,000 and a Caesarean \$30,000. Even those with insurance can expect to fork out an additional \$3,400.

The preference for home birth is contested by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the American Medical Association. Both insist that hospitals provide the safest settings for birth, with equipment on hand to deal with complications.

While the proportion of British women giving birth at home is higher than the US (2.3 per cent), the numbers have been falling. Some 25 per cent of women in the UK have Caesarean deliveries,

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 Mr V Patel

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