

“Planned” Home Birth Study* Misrepresented in the Press

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) has publicized the Pang study* with a press release that **misrepresents the study, misleads the public** about the actual conclusions and **omits mention of the study’s serious flaws**.

The authors themselves concluded that their study **should not be used to advise consumers** about the safety of planned home birth: “More light needs to be shed on this controversial topic before practitioners and expectant parents can be fairly counseled about the safety of planned home births.”

- The Pang study was based on birth registry data (birth certificates). Because birth certificate data does not include any information about the **intended site of birth**, the authors made **inappropriate assumptions** about which births were “planned” home births.
 - **No member of the research team had direct knowledge or experience with home birth**, and **they did not consult** with a single home birth expert or practitioner, so the authors **failed to consider** fundamental differences between home and hospital.
 - The authors admit that unplanned and unattended **births were wrongfully included** as “planned home births.”
 - The authors attributed to “planned home birth” perinatal deaths unrelated to the site of birth, and **failed to demonstrate any causal relationship between neonatal mortality and intended birth site**.
 - The authors **neglected to explain why their results contradict** every other study that has examined the safety of planned home births, a basic requirement of scientific studies.
- *The Pang study does not change the well-documented fact: **For a healthy low risk woman, a planned home birth attended by an experienced midwife (or physician) is as safe or safer than a doctor-attended birth in a hospital.***

*Pang, JWY, et al “Outcomes of Planned Home Birth In Washington State,” *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, 2002 Aug;100(2):253-259

See other side for quotes from this study.

Can We Trust the Pang Study's Results?

Here is what the authors say about their own study*:

"Because Washington State birth certificates do not identify which home births are planned, we defined planned home births" (Materials and Methods)

"This study has several limitations that are related to the reliance on birth certificate data. These include the potential for misclassifying unplanned home births ... and for misclassifying various outcomes and co-variates. In addition, data were missing for some potential confounders and effect modifiers." (Discussion)

"...misclassification of any unplanned home births as planned home births ... would result in inflated risk estimates of neonatal mortality and other outcomes for planned home births."

(Discussion)

"Several of the outcomes in this study may have been misclassified, namely respiratory distress requiring assisted ventilation for more than 30 minutes, prolonged labor, and postpartum hemorrhage." (Discussion)

"The likelihood of misclassification might be greater in a home setting than in a hospital ... the magnitude and direction of any such bias cannot be predicted and so caution should be used when interpreting the results for these outcomes." (Discussion)

"Nonetheless, more light needs to be shed on this controversial topic before practitioners and expectant parents can be fairly counseled about the safety of planned home births." (Discussion)

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A basic literature review of previous studies,
including one conducted in Washington State, demonstrates that

HOME BIRTH IS SAFE FOR MOTHERS AND BABIES.

Bibliography available upon request.