

Post marital post-marital return to natal home to have the first birth: does this sociocultural tradition disempower women? Evidence from Gweru, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Using a clinic-based questionnaire survey among first union, post-partum women and focus group discussions, the study analyses aspects of the sociocultural tradition of post-marital return to natal home to have the first birth that disempower women. Up to 64.8% of first time mothers surveyed had returned to natal homes to have first marital births. Mean duration of pregnancy at return to natal homes was 6.5 months. In over 60% of cases, the total period of stay at natal homes was five to six months. Return to natal homes is perceived as apprenticing women into motherhood. None of the women surveyed had achieved the optimum 12-13 prenatal care visits. The paper posits that in some social contexts, the tradition undermines survivorship status of mothers and their babies. Protracted spousal separation reduces partner(s)' involvement in childcare, increases vulnerability of women to STIs, HIV/AIDS infection, abandonment and union dissolution.

Keywords: Post marital, natal home, first birth, sociocultural tradition, Zimbabwe.