**INTRODUCTION**

Inuit women are concerned about the displacement of traditional midwives and the associated loss of knowledge needed for a viable community-based birthing system. The legacy of modern medical intervention and the routine evacuation of expectant mothers from home communities to regional and southern hospitals has not always been in the best interest of Inuit women, their families, or for Inuit cultural heritage in general.

**A NORTHERN PROBLEM**

As a result of changing birthing options, the skills and knowledge of Inuit Elders is not being passed on to current training or for Inuit cultural heritage in general.

**PAUKTUUTIT'S PROJECT**

Responding to concerns of Inuit women, Pauktuutit undertook a participatory research project to record the knowledge of 75 Inuit Elders describing their pregnancy, birthing, and midwife experiences. This information:

1. Supports culturally appropriate community-based birthing centres;
2. Contributes towards greater cultural understanding among health professionals; and
3. Fosters Inuit pride about a remarkable part of Arctic culture.

**INTERVIEWS WITH INUIT ELDERS**

Seventy-five interviews were conducted in late 1992 and early 1993 within 10 communities in four Inuit regions. All volunteers were interviewed. After pre-tests in Cape Dorset and Iqaluit, it was decided to shorten the questionnaire and to have an interviewer who spoke Inuktitut. The interviews were coded by keywords and themes. This facilitated the analysis of a large amount of text data.

**ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEWS**

Using a software program for qualitative analysis, the interviews were coded by keywords and themes. This facilitated the analysis of a large amount of text data. The following details are available for further analysis:

- Location and time of year for each birth described;
- Preferred season to give birth;
- Type of shelter used for each birth;
- Assistant(s) to each birth;
- The birth position, the supports, and props used;
- Tools used to cut the umbilical cord;
- Description of births attended as a midwife;
- Words or terms to describe a midwife;
- Inuit obstetric knowledge and practices;
- Traditional foods, plants, and products used;
- Special skills and qualities of a midwife;
- Training of Inuit midwives;
- Advice given to pregnant women;
- Dealing with extended pregnancies, breach births, blood loss, and other complications; and
- Naming babies.

**NEXT STEPS**

1. Develop practical uses for the collected knowledge;
2. Train and accredit more Inuit as midwives to reduce staff turnover;
3. Transfer the knowledge of Elders to Inuit youth;
4. Promote healthy pregnancies and healthy lifestyles among young women;
5. Health professionals from the South must become more sensitive to Inuit birthing heritage; and
6. Promote cultural pride in the heritage of Inuit midwifery.