



Women's Perceptions of Spirituality and Maternal Empowerment During Hydrotherapy in the First Stage of Labor: A Phenomenological Study

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Article Info

Article History:

Received : 12-05-2026

Approved : 08-07-2026

Published : 31-07-2026

Keywords:

Hydrotherapy;

Spirituality;

Empowerment; Labor

Abstract

Background: Childbirth is a multidimensional experience involving physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual aspects of women. Hydrotherapy as a non-pharmacological method is known to improve relaxation and comfort during labor, yet women's experiences of spirituality and empowerment during hydrotherapy remain underexplored. **Objective:** This study aimed to explore women's perceptions of spirituality and empowerment during hydrotherapy in the first stage of labor. **Methods:** This study used a qualitative approach with a descriptive phenomenological design. The research was conducted in August 2025 until January 2026 in Pekanbaru. Participants consisted of six women who had experienced hydrotherapy during the first stage of labor and were selected using purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and analyzed using Braun and Clarke thematic with six-step analysis. **Results:** Five major themes emerged from the study, namely spiritual closeness, inner strength and self-confidence, self-control during labor, gratitude and positive childbirth experiences, and maternal empowerment. Hydrotherapy helped mothers feel calmer, closer to God, more confident in facing labor, better able to regulate breathing and emotions, and more empowered during childbirth. **Conclusion:** Hydrotherapy during the first stage of labor not only provides physical benefits in reducing labor discomfort but also positively affects spirituality, psychological well-being, and maternal empowerment.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Childbirth is a complex and multidimensional physiological process involving the interplay of biological, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions of women's experiences. In contemporary midwifery practice, childbirth is no longer regarded solely as a medical event but also as a significant life experience for women. A positive childbirth experience can have long-term implications for maternal physical and psychological well-being, as well as for the mother-infant relationship. Conversely, a negative childbirth experience may contribute to trauma, anxiety, and fear of subsequent childbirth. Therefore, woman-centered care has become an essential approach in contemporary midwifery practice (World Health Organization, 2018).

The Indonesian context provides an important setting for exploring the multidimensional experience of childbirth. Pregnancy and childbirth in Indonesia are embedded within cultural, familial, and spiritual values that may influence women's perceptions and health-related behaviors. Studies of maternal health care in Indonesia have shown that local beliefs and cultural values can shape how communities interpret pregnancy and childbirth, including their understanding of appropriate care and support during these periods. Such beliefs may function as moral and spiritual guides and may influence women's experiences and decisions related to pregnancy and birth (Sari et al., 2023). This context is particularly relevant when

examining childbirth experiences because spiritual and cultural meanings may coexist with biomedical understandings of childbirth.

Spirituality may represent an important dimension of childbirth experiences. Previous research involving childbearing women across different cultural and religious contexts has identified childbirth as an experience through which women may feel closer to God, use prayer and religious beliefs as coping mechanisms, and attribute deeper meaning to the process of giving birth ([Callister et al., 2009](#)). Similarly, research on pregnancy and childbirth has demonstrated that spiritual care may contribute to women's sense of autonomy, security, and comfort during the childbirth process (Backes et al., 2022). In Indonesia, spiritual and religious values may also be incorporated into women's responses to pregnancy and childbirth, including prayer, remembrance of God, and other religious practices used to cope with fear, anxiety, and discomfort (Mutmainnah et al., 2023). Therefore, understanding childbirth experiences in the Indonesian context requires attention not only to physical and psychological dimensions but also to women's spiritual meaning-making and coping processes.

Vaginal birth remains an important component of maternity care in Indonesia, particularly within midwifery services. National maternal health programs continue to include spontaneous vaginal birth as an important component of childbirth services at primary healthcare facilities, alongside emergency management and referral when medically indicated (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2022). This reinforces the importance of providing supportive, respectful, and woman-centered care during the first stage of labor, particularly for women experiencing physiological labor. One of the major challenges during childbirth is the management of labor pain. Various non-pharmacological approaches have been developed to support women in coping with labor pain naturally, including hydrotherapy. Hydrotherapy involves the use of warm water during labor to promote relaxation, alleviate pain, and enhance maternal comfort. Evidence suggests that hydrotherapy can reduce muscle tension, improve blood circulation, and promote relaxation, thereby helping women cope with uterine contractions more comfortably ([Cluett & Burns, 2009](#)).

Beyond its physiological benefits, hydrotherapy may also have important psychological and emotional effects. Women who use hydrotherapy during labor have reported more positive childbirth experiences, greater feelings of calmness, increased perceived control, and a greater sense of meaning throughout the childbirth process ([Feeley et al., 2021](#)). A systematic review and meta-analysis also found that hydrotherapy during the first stage of labor was associated with reduced pain perception, greater maternal comfort, and a higher rate of vaginal birth, without evidence of adverse effects on several maternal and neonatal outcomes ([Ergin et al., 2024](#)). The warm and private environment provided by water may further enhance maternal comfort and safety while allowing women greater freedom of movement during labor.

Despite these potential benefits, hydrotherapy has not yet become a routinely available component of labor support across all midwifery practice settings in Indonesia. Its implementation requires appropriate facilities, trained midwives, clear clinical protocols, infection prevention measures, safety procedures, and institutional readiness. Evidence regarding hydrotherapy has predominantly been generated in healthcare settings outside Indonesia, while evidence exploring how Indonesian women experience hydrotherapy within their own cultural and spiritual context remains limited. Therefore, examining women's lived experiences may provide important contextual information for understanding the feasibility and acceptability of hydrotherapy as part of woman-centered midwifery care in Indonesia.

Within the context of childbirth experiences, empowerment has increasingly gained attention in midwifery research. Empowerment refers to women's perceived ability to maintain control over their bodies and the childbirth process, participate in decisions regarding their care, and develop confidence in their ability to actively navigate childbirth. Women who feel empowered during labor are more likely to report positive childbirth experiences and higher levels of satisfaction, as well as more positive relationships with the healthcare professionals supporting them ([Downe et al., 2018](#)).

The childbirth experience also encompasses an important spiritual dimension. Spirituality during childbirth may involve inner experiences, a sense of peace, a connection with God, and the attribution of deeper meaning to the process of giving birth. Alongside spirituality, empowerment represents an important component of contemporary maternity care, particularly in promoting women's autonomy and active participation in childbirth. Empowerment is associated with women's perceptions of control over their bodies and the childbirth process, their ability to make autonomous decisions, and their confidence in their own capacity to give birth ([Downe et al., 2018](#)). In the Indonesian context, these dimensions may intersect with culturally embedded religious and spiritual values, potentially shaping how women cope with labor and interpret their childbirth experiences.

Hydrotherapy during labor may facilitate the development of a sense of empowerment among women. The warm and soothing water environment can help women feel more relaxed, move more freely, and develop a stronger connection with their bodies. These conditions may enhance women's perceived control during labor and increase their confidence in coping with contractions. Qualitative studies have

indicated that women who experience hydrotherapy during labor often describe it as a calming and empowering experience that provides a greater sense of freedom in navigating the childbirth process (Feeley et al., 2021). Such experiences may be particularly meaningful when women are given opportunities to participate actively in decisions and actions related to their own labor.

The spiritual dimension of hydrotherapy also warrants further attention. The relaxation and sense of safety experienced during hydrotherapy may provide women with psychological space to engage in spiritual coping, such as prayer, surrender, gratitude, and acceptance. In this sense, the experience of feeling closer to God should not be interpreted as evidence that hydrotherapy directly increases spirituality. Rather, the calmness and relaxation associated with hydrotherapy may facilitate an environment in which women's existing spiritual beliefs and practices become more salient during childbirth. This interpretation is consistent with previous research showing that childbirth may serve as a context for spiritual coping, personal meaning-making, and experiences of connection with God (Callister et al., 2009).

Although previous studies have examined the benefits of hydrotherapy in reducing labor pain and improving maternal comfort, research specifically exploring women's experiences of spirituality and empowerment while undergoing hydrotherapy remains limited, particularly within the Indonesian cultural context. Furthermore, the limited availability and implementation of hydrotherapy in some midwifery practice settings highlight the need to understand how women perceive and experience this intervention beyond its clinical outcomes. Exploring women's subjective experiences may provide insights into the psychological, spiritual, and empowering dimensions of hydrotherapy that cannot be fully captured through quantitative measures alone.

Therefore, this study aimed to explore mothers' perceptions and experiences of spirituality and empowerment while undergoing hydrotherapy during the first stage of labor. By focusing on women's lived experiences, this study seeks to understand how hydrotherapy is perceived not only as a method for managing labor discomfort but also as an experience that may contribute to relaxation, perceived control, spiritual coping, personal meaning-making, and empowerment during childbirth.

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by extending the understanding of hydrotherapy beyond its physical and clinical benefits. While previous studies have primarily focused on pain reduction, labor outcomes, maternal comfort, and satisfaction, this study explores the spiritual and empowerment dimensions of women's childbirth experiences within the Indonesian cultural context. The findings provide a more holistic perspective on hydrotherapy by highlighting how women interpret the experience as a source of spiritual connectedness, self-confidence, self-control, gratitude, and empowerment, thereby contributing to the development of woman-centered maternity care that is responsive to the cultural and spiritual context of Indonesian women.

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design using a descriptive phenomenological approach. The study was conducted from August 2025 to January 2026 in Pekanbaru, Indonesia. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: women who had experienced hydrotherapy during the first stage of labor and were willing to participate in the study. A total of six participants were recruited, with recruitment continuing until data saturation was reached.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview guide. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and audio-recorded with the participants' consent. In addition to the interviews, the researcher maintained field notes to support the interpretation of the data.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis based on the approach developed by Braun and Clarke. The analysis involved several stages: repeatedly reading the interview transcripts, conducting initial coding, grouping codes into themes, reviewing the themes, defining and naming the themes, and producing the final report. Data trustworthiness was ensured through member checking, triangulation, and peer debriefing. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant health research ethics committee.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study involved six participants aged 25–34 years who underwent hydrotherapy during the first stage of labor. The duration of hydrotherapy ranged from 60 to 120 minutes, and all participants experienced normal childbirth without complications. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by extending the understanding of hydrotherapy beyond its physical and clinical benefits. While previous studies have primarily focused on pain reduction, labor outcomes, maternal comfort, and satisfaction, this study explores the spiritual and empowerment dimensions of women's childbirth experiences within the Indonesian cultural context. The findings provide a more holistic perspective on hydrotherapy by highlighting how women interpret the experience as a source of spiritual connectedness,

self-confidence, self-control, gratitude, and empowerment, thereby contributing to the development of woman-centered maternity care.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Code	Age	Parity	Gestational Age	Duration of Hydrotherapy
P1	27 years	P2A1	39 weeks	±90 minutes
P2	30 years	P1A0	40 weeks	±60 minutes
P3	25 years	P1A0	38 weeks	±120 minutes
P4	32 years	P3A2	37 weeks	±75 minutes
P5	29 years	P2A1	39 weeks	±100 minutes
P6	34 years	P3A2	40 weeks	±80 minutes

The study involved six participants who were women undergoing spontaneous vaginal birth and who used hydrotherapy during the first stage of labor. The participants' ages ranged from 24 to 35 years, with parity consisting of both primiparous and multiparous women. Gestational age at delivery ranged from 37 to 40 weeks.

All participants used hydrotherapy during the first stage of labor, with varying durations ranging from 60 to 120 minutes (or 2–4 hours in the extended data), and all births occurred without complications, with the babies born in healthy condition. The participants' physical conditions upon admission to the delivery room were within normal limits, as indicated by stable blood pressure, pulse, respiratory rate, and body temperature. Several participants had specific characteristics, including a history of mild anxiety, previous childbirth experience, and support from their husbands during labor.

Spiritual Connectedness

Participants reported that being immersed in warm water provided a sense of calm and comfort and helped them feel closer to God during the childbirth process. *“As soon as my body entered the warm water, I immediately felt relieved. I became calmer and was no longer afraid.” (P1).* This statement indicates that the experience of hydrotherapy was not only perceived in terms of physical benefits, such as reduced tension and pain, but also in psychological and spiritual dimensions. The sense of calm that emerged while being in the water enabled mothers to shift their attention away from fear and pain toward a more reflective state. In this condition, mothers may find it easier to pray, surrender, and perceive childbirth as an experience with spiritual value.

This finding is consistent with [Feeley et al. \(2021\)](#), who, through a systematic meta-thematic synthesis, demonstrated that women using water immersion described childbirth as a calming and comfortable experience that helped them cope with pain and enhanced their sense of control over the childbirth process. [Reviriego-Rodrigo et al. \(2023\)](#) also found that women's experiences during water immersion included relaxation, calmness, increased control, and positive childbirth experiences.

Theoretically, emotional calmness during childbirth can be understood through the relationship between pain perception, anxiety, and the stress response. When mothers experience anxiety and fear, their attention tends to focus on perceived threats and pain. Conversely, a comfortable and secure environment may help women maintain focus, regulate their breathing, and employ more adaptive coping strategies. Warm water provides a sense of comfort while also allowing women to change positions more easily, enabling the childbirth experience to be perceived as more manageable and controlled.

[Carlsson and Ulfssdottir \(2020\)](#) found that women who experienced waterbirth described psychological benefits including increased relaxation and control within an environment perceived as safe and less medicalized. [Antonakou et al. \(2018\)](#) similarly found that all participants in their qualitative study reported positive childbirth experiences and felt more capable of coping with pain after using water immersion.

The experience of feeling “closer to God” in this study may be understood as part of the women's personal meaning-making process in response to the calmness and relaxation they experienced during hydrotherapy. Rather than directly increasing spirituality, hydrotherapy may have provided a supportive psychological space in which spiritual coping could emerge, including prayer, surrender, gratitude, and acceptance of the childbirth process. From the perspective of existential meaning, these experiences may reflect women's efforts to interpret childbirth as a meaningful and transformative life event, particularly when they experienced a greater sense of calm, control, and emotional acceptance. This finding is also consistent with the concept of childbirth spirituality, in which childbirth may become a deeply personal experience involving connection with God, transcendence, meaning, and acceptance. Thus, the women's perception of feeling “closer to God” should be interpreted as an individual spiritual response associated

with their childbirth experience and the relaxation facilitated by hydrotherapy, rather than as evidence that hydrotherapy directly enhances spirituality.

This finding is important from the perspective of holistic midwifery care. Childbirth is not merely a physiological event but also a psychological, social, and spiritual experience. Therefore, midwives should provide women with opportunities to engage in spiritual practices that are consistent with their beliefs, provided that these practices do not compromise clinical safety. This approach is consistent with the principles of woman-centered care, which position women's experiences, values, needs, and preferences as important components of maternity care.

Inner Strength and Self-Confidence

Participants felt more confident in their bodies' ability to cope with contractions and give birth vaginally. *"The contractions felt intense, but in the water I felt that my body was following its own rhythm."* (P3). This statement illustrates the emergence of inner strength and increased self-confidence in facing the childbirth process. Rather than perceiving contractions solely as something that had to be resisted, the mother began to experience her body as capable of following the physiological process of labor.

This finding can be explained through the concept of self-efficacy developed by Bandura. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to perform the actions required to achieve a particular goal. In the context of childbirth, self-efficacy relates to women's confidence in their ability to cope with contractions, regulate their responses to pain, participate in the childbirth process, and give birth to their babies.

Hydrotherapy may provide experiences that strengthen self-efficacy through several mechanisms. First, reduced pain perception may enable mothers to feel more capable of coping with contractions. Second, the buoyancy of water provides greater freedom of movement, allowing women to choose the position they find most comfortable. Third, the experience of successfully coping with one contraction after another may constitute a mastery experience that reinforces self-confidence.

The findings of [Reviriego-Rodrigo et al. \(2023\)](#) specifically demonstrated that women using water immersion reported a feeling of control, relaxation, increased comfort, and an empowering experience. [Feeley et al. \(2021\)](#) also showed that water immersion was associated with women feeling more capable of coping with the childbirth process and having a more positive experience. [Carlsson and Ulfsdottir \(2020\)](#) found that the psychological benefits of waterbirth included increased relaxation and control within an environment perceived as safe and less medicalized. Meanwhile, [Antonakou et al. \(2018\)](#) found that women who experienced water immersion reported positive childbirth experiences and felt more empowered after childbirth.

Through a systematic review and meta-analysis of 20 studies involving a total of 8,254 women, [Ergin et al. \(2024\)](#) found that hydrotherapy during the first stage of labor was associated with reduced pain perception and increased comfort. These findings provide support for the subjective experiences reported by participants in the present study and are consistent with broader evidence regarding the benefits of hydrotherapy for comfort during childbirth. The emergence of inner strength does not imply that hydrotherapy eliminates all childbirth pain. Rather, mothers become more capable of accepting and coping with the sensations associated with contractions. This change represents an important aspect of pain coping. Thus, maternal success should not be measured solely by a reduction in pain intensity but also by an increased ability to manage responses to pain.

Self-Control During Labor

Hydrotherapy helped mothers regulate their breathing, emotions, and responses to labor pain. *"I could regulate my breathing more regularly. I usually panic, but the water helped me stay more focused."* (P2). This statement demonstrates that warm water was perceived as an environment that helped mothers regain a sense of control during labor. This control was reflected in their ability to regulate breathing, maintain focus, and reduce panic as contractions intensified.

During labor, a perceived loss of control may increase anxiety. Conversely, when women feel that they have control over their bodies and the childbirth environment, they may be better able to employ effective coping strategies. Water immersion provides women with opportunities to move, choose positions, and adjust their bodies in response to contractions. These conditions may enhance perceived control and help women engage more actively in the childbirth process.

[Reviriego-Rodrigo et al. \(2023\)](#) found that a greater sense of control was one of the main benefits reported by women during water immersion. [Carlsson and Ulfsdottir \(2020\)](#) similarly reported that women described increased control as one of the major psychological benefits of waterbirth.

A prospective study of women using water immersion also demonstrated that comfort and relaxation were prominent experiences. In a study involving 740 Australian women, the highest-rated benefits included a sense of safety, a positive childbirth experience, the calming effect of water, and

freedom of movement. More than 90% of the women reported that they would be likely to recommend water immersion to other women.

Physiologically, warm water may promote relaxation and help reduce pain perception. However, this mechanism should be interpreted cautiously. Research supports the effects of hydrotherapy on comfort and pain perception, but not all hormonal mechanisms frequently described in earlier literature have been consistently demonstrated in every woman.

[Cluett, Burns, and Cuthbert \(2018\)](#), through a Cochrane Review, found that water immersion during the first stage of labor may reduce the use of regional analgesia, although evidence regarding several other obstetric outcomes remains variable. [Ergin et al. \(2024\)](#) also found reduced pain perception and increased comfort among women receiving hydrotherapy. The experience of self-control in this study can be understood as the result of an interaction between physical comfort, freedom of movement, relaxation, support from healthcare providers, and women's perception of their ability to cope with contractions. This sense of control may subsequently contribute to a more positive childbirth experience.

Gratitude and Positive Experience

Participants perceived childbirth with hydrotherapy as a peaceful, comfortable, and meaningful experience. *"This was my most peaceful childbirth. I was able to enjoy the process."* (P4). This finding demonstrates a shift in the way women perceived their childbirth experience. Rather than focusing solely on pain and discomfort, mothers were able to perceive the childbirth process as an experience that could be enjoyed and interpreted positively. A positive childbirth experience is an important component of the quality of maternity care. It encompasses feelings of safety, being valued and listened to, having control, receiving support, and being able to participate in decision-making. Thus, the success of maternity care should not be determined solely by maternal and neonatal clinical outcomes but also by how women experience the childbirth process.

[Feeley et al. \(2021\)](#) demonstrated that women's experiences of water immersion were associated with comfort, relaxation, control, and positive childbirth experiences. [Antonakou et al. \(2018\)](#) also found that all women in their study reported positive experiences and high levels of satisfaction with childbirth involving water immersion.

Similar findings were reported by [Carlsson and Ulfssdottir \(2020\)](#), who found that women described waterbirth as an experience providing physical and psychological benefits, particularly relaxation, control, and a sense of safety. From an evidence-based practice perspective, these positive experiences are also supported by quantitative research. [Burns et al. \(2022\)](#), through a systematic review and meta-analysis, found that water immersion/waterbirth was associated with several maternal benefits, including increased satisfaction, while some obstetric interventions could be reduced.

The gratitude experienced by participants may be viewed as part of the meaning-making process following childbirth. When mothers feel capable of coping with contractions, receive support, and have opportunities to participate in the childbirth process, these experiences may be interpreted as personal achievements. Among mothers with a religious orientation, such experiences of achievement may develop into feelings of gratitude and surrender to God.

Maternal Empowerment

Participants felt more empowered and more in control of the childbirth process. *"I was the one who decided when to enter the water and when to get out, and that made me feel empowered."* (P3). This statement clearly illustrates the dimension of empowerment, namely women's increased ability to make decisions, utilize available resources, and actively participate in their childbirth experience. In this study, empowerment did not arise merely from being in the water but primarily from women's perception that they had choices regarding when to use hydrotherapy and when to discontinue it.

Empowerment is an important component of woman-centered care. Women are not merely recipients of clinical interventions but are central decision-makers regarding their bodies and childbirth experiences, provided that their choices remain within the boundaries of clinical safety.

[Reviriego-Rodrigo et al. \(2023\)](#) found that water immersion could provide women with a greater sense of autonomy and control. The review also showed that women described water immersion as a liberating, transformative, and empowering experience. [Feeley et al. \(2021\)](#) similarly identified themes related to control, comfort, and positive experiences among women using water immersion.

[Clews, Church, and Ekberg \(2019\)](#), through a systematic meta-synthesis of qualitative research on waterbirth, identified key concepts related to women's autonomy and control throughout the childbirth process. These findings reinforce the results of the present study, suggesting that hydrotherapy may serve as one means of supporting a more woman-centered childbirth experience.

[Antonakou et al. \(2018\)](#) also reported that women felt highly empowered after experiencing childbirth with water immersion. Meanwhile, a study of Australian women found that freedom of movement was one of the highest-rated benefits among water immersion users. Freedom of movement is important to empowerment because it enables women to participate directly in determining the positions and strategies they perceive as most comfortable. The buoyancy of water allows women to change positions relatively easily. This may reduce their dependence on positions determined solely by healthcare providers.

However, empowerment should be distinguished from the concept of “the mother being free to determine everything without limits.” In clinical practice, freedom of choice must be accompanied by adequate information, assessment of maternal and fetal conditions, and continuous attention to safety. [Cooper et al. \(2018\)](#) demonstrated that midwives generally support water immersion, although its implementation may be influenced by healthcare professionals’ competencies, facilities, equipment, and institutional policies.

This finding indicates that women’s empowerment does not depend solely on individual maternal characteristics but also on the healthcare system. Midwives play an important role in creating an environment that enables women to receive information, express their preferences, and participate in decision-making.

Integration of Findings: Hydrotherapy as a Holistic Childbirth Experience

When the five themes are integrated, the participants’ experiences extend beyond physical benefits such as comfort or pain reduction. Hydrotherapy became part of a childbirth experience encompassing physical, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions.

The experience can be understood sequentially as follows: warm water provides comfort and relaxation → relaxation helps mothers reduce fear and maintain focus → the ability to cope with contractions enhances self-confidence → increased self-confidence strengthens perceived control and empowerment → the childbirth experience is subsequently interpreted as positive, peaceful, and, for some mothers, spiritually meaningful.

This experiential model is consistent with the systematic thematic synthesis by [Reviriego-Rodrigo et al. \(2023\)](#), which demonstrated that the benefits of water immersion included pain reduction, relaxation, increased control, comfort, freedom of movement, and a more positive childbirth experience. [Feeley et al. \(2021\)](#) likewise demonstrated that women’s experiences of water immersion extend beyond pain management to include emotional dimensions, control, and subjective experiences during childbirth.

Quantitative evidence further supports these findings. [Ergin et al. \(2024\)](#) found that hydrotherapy during the first stage of labor was associated with reduced pain perception and increased comfort. [Burns et al. \(2022\)](#) also identified benefits of water immersion/waterbirth for several maternal outcomes, including satisfaction with the childbirth experience.

Meanwhile, the Cochrane Review by [Cluett et al. \(2018\)](#) indicated that water immersion during the first stage of labor may reduce the use of regional analgesia, although evidence concerning several obstetric and neonatal outcomes remains limited. Therefore, hydrotherapy should not be positioned as an intervention that guarantees pain-free or complication-free childbirth, but rather as one non-pharmacological option that may help women experience childbirth more comfortably and actively.

From a holistic midwifery perspective, the findings of this study demonstrate that the success of hydrotherapy can be understood more broadly than simply as a reduction in pain scores. Mothers’ experiences of feeling calm, confident, self-controlled, grateful, and empowered indicate that intrapartum interventions need to consider women’s subjective experiences.

The spiritual dimension also represents an important finding. The literature on water immersion has predominantly focused on relaxation, pain, control, comfort, and satisfaction rather than specifically on religious experiences. Therefore, the finding concerning spiritual connectedness may represent a contextual contribution of this study, particularly within a cultural and belief context in which childbirth is perceived not only as a biological process but also as an experience with a spiritual dimension.

Hydrotherapy may be considered an approach with the potential to support a positive childbirth experience, particularly when implemented within a care framework that respects women’s choices, provides adequate information, ensures maternal and neonatal safety, and offers support from competent midwives. Empowerment does not simply involve giving mothers the opportunity to choose whether to use water; rather, it involves creating conditions in which women genuinely understand their options, feel heard, and are able to participate in decision-making throughout labor.

The five themes identified in this study demonstrate that the experience of hydrotherapy is multidimensional. Spiritual connectedness reflects the dimensions of meaning and calmness; inner strength and self-confidence reflect increased self-efficacy; self-control represents the ability to cope with contractions; gratitude and positive experience reflect the process of meaning-making regarding childbirth;

while maternal empowerment reflects women's autonomy and participation in decision-making throughout the childbirth process. These five dimensions are interconnected and collectively shape a more holistic and woman-centered childbirth experience.

4. CONCLUSION

This study has several limitations. First, the findings were based on interviews with only six participants from a single setting in Pekanbaru, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other cultural and healthcare contexts. Second, all participants experienced uncomplicated vaginal births and positive hydrotherapy experiences; therefore, the perspectives of women with adverse birth outcomes or unsuccessful hydrotherapy experiences were not represented. Third, the study relied on retrospective interviews conducted after childbirth, which may have been influenced by recall bias. Future studies involving more diverse participants, multiple research settings, and longitudinal qualitative approaches are recommended to provide a broader understanding of women's experiences with hydrotherapy during labor.

Hydrotherapy during the first stage of labor provides a positive and meaningful experience for mothers across physical, psychological, spiritual, and empowerment dimensions. Hydrotherapy helps mothers achieve inner calmness, strengthen their spiritual connectedness, enhance self-confidence, facilitate self-control during labor, and increase their perceived ability to cope with contractions and the childbirth process. These findings reinforce the importance of implementing holistic, humanistic, and woman-centered midwifery care in maternity services. Midwives should consider hydrotherapy as one of the non-pharmacological options within woman-centered maternity care.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors would like to express their gratitude to AIPKEMA for providing research funding support and to Universitas Muhammadiyah Riau for providing institutional support throughout the research process. The authors also extend their sincere appreciation to all participants who were willing to share their experiences and contribute to this study.

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