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Interview transcript participant #01

Auriluz Pacheco

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**NEW YORK CITY MATERNAL HEALTH ORAL HISTORY
PROJECT**

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INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT PARTICIPANT #01

Interviewer: Auriluz Pacheco

Date of Interview: October 23rd, 2020

Location of Interview: New York, NY

NYC MHOP Interview Transcript #01

Transcribed by Auriluz Pacheco

Auriluz: It is October 23rd, 2020, and today I am conducting an interview via Zoom, doing an oral history the New York City Maternal Health Oral History Project, which aim to document the experiences of women who underwent or are currently undergoing pregnancy during the Covid-19 pandemic. Before we begin, I'll just be asking a few demographic questions, is that alright?

Participant 1: Yes that's fine.

Auriluz: So would you be able to tell me your age?

Participant 1: 28

Auriluz: Would you be able to give me a range of your income?

Participant 1: Pre- COVID or during COVID?

Auriluz: You can give me both.

Participant 1: Pre-COVID t was 51,000. Post COVID, not. I don't know if I should give you my husband's as well. We live together.

Auriluz: What borough do you live in?

Participant 1: The Bronx.

Auriluz: So for the study, it is for women that are caring for and women that have already given birth, so are you currently pregnant, or did you already give birth?

Participant 1: Already gave birth.

Auriluz: Okay, when did you find out you're pregnant? Was it before or during the shutdown?

Participant 1: Right before the summer.

Auriluz: So how are you currently feeling? How were you feeling? When everything happened?

Participant 1: When I found out I was pregnant, I was disappointed. I had just gotten married and I wanted to wait a while. So there was already uncertainty about the timing. I was like whoa, I'm supposed to have my baby right now. In terms of family situations, my father was diagnosed with cancer at the beginning of the year and we lost him in May so it was like cancer diagnosis, giving birth.. Give me a minute. So it's hard to describe how I was feeling during pregnancy because it has been a roller coaster. And then to give birth during the pandemic was the icing on the cake.

Auriluz: What month did you give birth?

Participant 1: March, end of March. It was the beginning of quarantine so everything was new. Nobody knew anything and laws were being created to take away a lot of rights from pregnant women and birthing women. It was a mess.

Auriluz: You said they took your rights, what do you mean by that?

Participant 1: Say we're not allowing people to go to the hospital with the birthing parent. Thankfully I had switched hospitals before the pandemic and the quarantine started so I was at a hospital that had private rooms only so they didn't take up that policy. However, had I not changed, I would have been at Mount Sinai where they were the first ones to say "no the father can't come in". So, but then I gave birth in the morning and then later in the day, someone messages me like, Oh, they took away the mandate that the father can't come in. I'm like, well, that's great but I already gave birth. So had I been at that hospital, I would have been screwed for no reason. Thankfully, they got rid of that quickly. But they still made my husband leave once they took me to the postpartum room with the recovery room, which I didn't understand either. And it was very hard dealing with a newborn myself that first time.

Auriluz: How do you currently feel?

Participant 1: I don't know. I want to say better, but it's more like I'm numb to the circumstances now. The world is upside down right now.

Auriluz: What concerns do you have surrounding your health? The baby, pregnancy? What concerns did you have in the beginning when everything started happening?

Participant 1: When things first started we had a COVID scare because of my job. So before the quarantine, I was made to self quarantine. Turns out, I didn't have COVID regardless, but that was the case. And immediately, like, my care just stops, the hospital told me not to come in anymore until the 14 days are over. And then until I was past 40 days, which is scary to do, anyway. But once I gave birth, I just felt violated by the whole birthing experience. Especially in the hospital, I had every desire to give birth at home, but I didn't have the finances to do it. So going through the hospital and the experience I had just made me like, more, advocate more for home births. Like if you are, if you have no complications, you should not have to go to a hospital to give birth. Now, that's what I like, my mindset is just healing from the experience and taking care of my son and still avoiding COVID, because so far, my husband and I and my son, thankfully have not had it. But we've been super isolated from mostly everyone. So that's, that's hard. It's like It's like the lesser of two evils, you're isolated, or you risk getting this virus, not knowing.

Auriluz: We're actually going to touch a little bit more on that later on. Were there any things that you had heard about COVID in pregnancy?

Participant 1: While I was pregnant, no, there was barely any information there was just a lot of uncertainty. And that's the main reason why we were very strict about my quarantine. And my husband works in the hospital. So he has to be super diligent about disinfecting, and not bringing

things home. Thankfully, he got paid family leave. So he didn't go back to work for a very long time after the baby was born. But there was like no information back then.

Auriluz: Are there any things that you hear about it now?

Participant 1: Things that would affect us. Just, just the basic stuff like I've just been looking more into, like prevention tactics and immune system boosting techniques and stuff. How to keep my home like, safe more than anything else.

Auriluz: Can you describe what your experience was like to me?

Participant 1: With pregnancy and birth or COVID?

Auriluz: Both.

Participant 1: My pregnancy was normal, no complications at all. I just had morning sickness. Other than that, no complications. When it came time to give birth, like I laid, mostly at home, obviously, I had to quarantine. Then I knew that I wanted to spend as little time as possible in the hospital because that's where people were getting infected most. So we labored mostly at home. I went to the hospital at about 2am-3am and was six centimeters dilated when I got there. I feel like once I got there, I got stuck between seven and eight centimeters for like a few hours. But in total my neighbor was 13 hours of active labor. But I was having cramps, crappy contractions for like, exactly 24 hours. I gave birth and what made me more frustrated especially because of COVID was that I had switched hospitals in order to have a midwife take care of me and help me birth. So I went to a hospital that was like their maternity ward was literally all just midwives taking care of everyone. When it came time for me to give birth, they had just switched staff. So I didn't get to have a midwife I wanted even though I didn't know any midwives there because I had just switched and they didn't go to any appointments because of Covid so I didn't get to meet anybody that was actually at my labor. But when it came time to push the midwife was like getting ready. Then I see a man walking and just sitting back in the room. Obviously, I'm preoccupied. So I didn't mention anything. I wish I had and been like, I don't want men in here because it would just save me a lot of stress. But he was just watching everything happen. And I just kept seeing more and more people coming in, like thinking back, if they wanted to kick out my husband, because they were trying to not get people infected. Why would they have this many people in my room on top of me while I'm like, pushing? But I couldn't think of that, obviously. Next thing, you know, the guy in the back just skipped something, it's like, the baby's heart rate is going down, it felt like he exaggerated his mannerisms. But the midwife literally stepped back, like with her arms up, like, there was some hierarchy here. He was an OB. They just took over, in my eyes, just exaggerating what the situation was like, "the baby's heart rate went down". "She's not pushing hard enough." Blah, blah blah. I had only pushed like twice at that point. Some more people came in to assist him. He had like an assistant and the assistant had someone watching her. But long story short, he said the heartbeat was like spiking, he was gonna have to use a vacuum. I was against it; I wanted a completely unassisted birth. If I had the balls, I would have given birth at home by myself. But lo and behold, I did in a different way. But consistent. When I said no, I didn't want the vacuum. They didn't listen to me at all. They went and got the vacuum. I pushed, they pulled him out like yanked him out by his head. I had taken a

birthing class before then. So I knew that they usually remove the vacuum once the baby's head is out. They didn't. They waited for another contraction, and then they yanked the baby down, which was way more painful, because I did not have enough control. But he was out and then they didn't want to give me the baby. "He's not looking too good." Meanwhile, I have taken a birthing class and I knew what he should look like. And the fact that he was moving and breathing and trying to cry for me. I was like, um you're holding him upside down just give them to me, like he clearly needs to be held correctly. So my husband had to step in and be like, you need to give her the baby now. So we did for like two minutes. And then we're like, well don't clamp the cord. We want him to get all of that blood back. They were like, Oh, we already did that when he came out. I was like why would you even do that? That's not safe. Imagine if he had something wrong, like, anyway, that was completely ignored in our first plan. So then they took him away to get shots and they brought him back. Then the assistant tells me the OB guy just leaves. I don't know when he left, but he was nowhere in sight. The assistant told me that I tore. I asked her what degree it is and she's like, I don't know, we have to finish getting the placenta out to then examine everything away. Okay, so I'm delivering placenta and then she's like, I'm gonna have to go in and just like make sure the whole placenta came out. Like, what the hell does that mean? Her hand goes up inside me and like swoops around my uterus and comes out and I'm just like, oh, that's what she meant. Then they're sewing me up and she doesn't even talk to me. She talks to the guy that she's apparently teaching how to sew which no one ever asked me if I wanted to have students there. No one ever even introduced themselves to me. And anyway, they're sewing me up and she mentioned that it's a second degree. So I was like, okay, that's not so bad. I'm thinking whatever. Later when telling somebody like my birth story, my husband was like you didn't tear, they cut you. So I didn't even know that they gave me an episiotomy. Later in my postpartum days even while they were sewing them, like, I feel like something isn't right. But it was taking them forever to sew me up. And I didn't even have my baby on me. So like, I was very present to the fact that there was a lot going on down there. And later in postpartum, when I go to the postpartum visit, the OB tells me that I didn't heal right. In my head, I know that they didn't sew it, right. So she mentioned that granulation tissue grew on the cut. So that's another thing that I don't know, I feel like it has not been so hectic with COVID. And just being in hospital, I would have avoided all of that. So that's like my big hang up about COVID. Seems like it's a pass for doctors to do whatever they want, and not really communicate.

Auriluz: Can you tell me a little bit about what granulation means?

Participant 1: You know when you get a cut when you were little, and skin would start going from inside the cut and create this lump. And then there was like, I could feel it when I would use the bathroom like a gap in the stitching where I would feel like a hole. And it seems like more tissue grew. And it took forever like now, maybe six and a half months old. And now I don't feel discomfort with like sexual activity or using the bathroom. Like it took forever for me to feel even some semblance of normal, because that just created this extra tissue that was always in the way. And apparently she had to burn it off. Yeah, it's all a lot.

Auriluz: So how did your experience change in terms of the attention or the appointments that you were receiving? Even though it was that brief period of two weeks-three weeks?

Participant 1: I stopped receiving any medical attention, I would call in if I had a concern. Like I told him, I called him on my due date, like, okay, we're at my due date. And I'm not feeling like I'm gonna be giving birth anytime soon. Okay, we'll schedule a non stress test for that day. And that was when I was able to go in and like check on the baby and everything. And then I have one more before I give birth to him.

Auriluz: And that was because you called and told them?

Participant 1: Yeah, that was because I called him. And the 14 days of quarantine had already passed.

Auriluz: So what do you wish you received while you were there? Or, wish was different?

Participant 1: I wish I had when I went to give birth than anybody had asked me, like, what preferences I had for my birth. I wish people had introduced themselves to me, so I could be like, Oh, this person by this name helped me in this way. But it wasn't. It was very, like, cold, coming in for like split seconds to like, Look, check. It was just very cold. And I didn't want to be around patients that much, especially since it was me and my husband. I wish I'd stayed home, hired a midwife and stayed home.

Auriluz: How was access in the hospital and the resources after?

Participant 1: After labor, I didn't really have much access to anybody. I remember calling because I was feeling all that discomfort with the episiotomy. And I had gotten constipated after a while and I could not get rid of it. So I had like one consultation over the phone, which nothing they told me really helped. One thing that I was really looking forward to was seeing the lactation consultant because of COVID they didn't have any lactation consultants there when I gave birth. Or even when I went for my postpartum visit, they asked me to just call him again. I had a really, really hard time with breastfeeding. Even now I still do. So I can't help but wonder if I had that support from the beginning, if things would be different.

Auriluz: And how were the follow up appointments?

Participant 1: I only had one. And it was pretty bad. My dad was one week from passing away, because he was on hospice care and looking back, he died a week after I had my six week appointment. And he, I told them, well, I told the OB, they always talk about postpartum depression and stuff and give you a questionnaire. They asked me at first, like, how are you doing mentally? Like? Well, yeah, I feel sad most of the time, because of everything that's going on. She's like, Oh, well, what do you mean by that? And I was like, well, look at everything that's going on. And I already told her about my dad. So she was like, well, I'm gonna give you a questionnaire and it's decipher like, if you have postpartum depression, you would answer on a scale from 0-5. But if you don't have postpartum then the right answer is zero. She just kept saying the right answer is zero. Because if you answer anything else, then we send you to be evaluated. I was not going to be in the hospital for any longer than I needed it to be. And I wanted to go see my dad for the last time, because I was quarantining for him too, so I answered zero for everything. So I never got that resource or help either.

Auriluz: They didn't give the help in that way either in terms of mental health and stuff?

Participant 1: Yeah.

Auriluz: So, you said that that was like the only follow up appointment that you had?

Participant 1: Yeah.

Auriluz: Okay. And did you attempt to go back after that? Or were you just too unsatisfied?

Participant 1: I was so unsatisfied there. I knew I didn't want to go back there. And afterwards, I wanted to set up an appointment with a different OB at a different hospital, different clinic, something like that. But I never did because of just taking care of a newborn and COVID not trying to be around people just like never mind.

Auriluz: Did your provider give you any additional resources? You previously mentioned no mental health resources.

Participant 1: No, I haven't seen my PCT in a long time.

Auriluz: Are there any resources that you wish they would have provided?

Participant 1: Definitely like the mental health support, even if it's like, virtual or anything like that, instead of like deterring someone from being honest about what they're going through. They offered me a referral to WIC, which I did take advantage of at that appointment. So I was able to sign up for WIC and that has helped during this time. I wish they had offered the lactation consultant.

Auriluz: But was there anything that you wish you would see specifically like while pregnant?

Participant 1: Ummm, no *pause* Actually, when I switched they gave me a bunch of referrals to different things like they signed me up for WIC, but obviously without a referral before because I didn't have a baby. But they also gave me a number, a flyer for a free doula. So I did take advantage of that. And I had a free doula, but because of Coronavirus I didn't get to use her. Only, like we had her on the phone. My husband was able to communicate with her during labor. And we had one visit with her before the quarantine. But that was another resource that was like I was really looking forward to but couldn't have because of coronavirus. I feel like all moms need a doula like telling her my story after I gave birth. She's like, I wish I could have been there like I would have seen this like no or spoken to me and be like this is what's happening. This is what they're trying to do, if you don't want that - communicate to them that you don't want. Because I didn't have I didn't have the brainpower to formulate sentences at that point. But yeah, it's definitely a resource that I feel is like, super necessary. And I'm so grateful that they offered it. I can't even send you the flyer that they sent me if you want to, like, offer it to other people because they have it in every borough.

Auriluz: Yeah, you can send it to me. I'll reach out to them too. Thank you. So you've mentioned these resources and the things you have insight on so how knowledgeable would you say you are or that you were around your options around childbirth going in?

Participant 1: I feel like I was very knowledgeable. And that's why what happened to me, like really messed me up as much as I did. Because I was able to see through, like, how they do things in order to like, do these extra procedures on women and like, introduce drugs and all this other stuff. So having, like, we paid for a birthing course, and I don't want these people as resources behind is like letting us know how things should go and all this other stuff. Yeah, I feel like the term ignorance is bliss, in this case it was definitely true.

Auriluz: What do you mean by that?

Participant 1: Had I not known everything I knew my birth would seem so quick and easy to other people. Like, oh, yeah, everyone gets a PCR or or something or so many babies are born with a vacuum, it's a quicker way to get them out, instead of pushing for hours. Like I pushed for 20 minutes. Without any assistance. That's amazing. I want that. But when it was done to me, it was like, I felt violated, like there was just so many hands. And I knew that that's one thing I didn't want at all, like I did not want people's hands inside me. I didn't want the vacuum. I had to take my son to a chiropractor after the fact just to fix like, his alignment, his neck was all messed up. Like just so many things came from them doing these things. And even after the fact I asked for the medical records to see what it was they wrote. And things don't match up with how they happened. Things that they did that I was like, like, having taken the birth course I knew that if my son came out and was struggling to breathe, if his umbilical cord was still attached, he was still getting oxygen for me. So we had a few minutes to like, troubleshoot and do what we had to do to get him to breathe on his own. The fact that they clammed it before he was even all the way out was super suspicious to me. Like were you trying to hurt him? And then he came out. They're like, Oh, no, we need to take him, he's not looking too good. Like no he looks perfectly fine. He's trying to cry. Then I look at the medical records. And he said he has an AGPAR score of 90, which means he was completely fine. I'm like, none of this adds up to a healthy delivery. Why did I know that? Because I took the time to educate myself, had I not I would have been like, oh, and that was super quick. I would of thought all of that is normal.. But I know it's not the standard that we should be looking for at all. We should be treated better.

Auriluz: What are some things you learned to better your experience? And what are some things you wish you knew? The first question was more regarding your options, midwives, doulas, natural birth. And then this one I want to say it's more you touch on that in your answers. We can skip it if you want. But are there some things that you wish you did know? Aside from the knowledge that you already had.

Participant 1: That they still intervene even when intervention is not necessary. I was not expecting that. I thought like oh, it's the baby's not okay, I'm not doing okay, then they intervene. But seeing things play out that way I wish I had known like they intervene sometimes because they want to educate their students or they want to show specific things or that's what I felt like. They had just switched staff. I was the first birth of the day so they really wanted to get their

hands in there and like to get hands-on experience and I had no epidural like so. Yeah, that's one thing.

Auriluz: And you also mentioned this earlier in other answers in terms of the type of birth that you wanted to have.

Participant 1: Yeah I wanted completely natural, no intervention and assisting I guess.

Auriluz: And you said that even before your experience you wanted to have it at home.

Participant 1: Yeah, early in the pregnancy. I was looking at two midwives but their rates were too high for me. And then when COVID kicked in I was able to reach out to the person leading my childbirth class who was a midwife and tell her like, I really don't want to go to a hospital, is there any way you could assist? She said my practice is full but I'm gonna send you somebody who just started a practice, if you're comfortable. She's very good, like, stuff. And she was willing to work with me but insurance wasn't willing to work with us. So I had to just give that up as well. And I wish I hadn't. Because after like Corona started with like the stimulus check. And I don't know, it seems like money started coming in from I don't know where. So if I had just done the midwife route, we would have paid her off within the first few weeks.

Auriluz: So you mentioned that you were very knowledgeable about the birthing experience. So where were you getting your information from? Whether like family, friends, medical professionals, online?

Participant 1: Medical professionals, I'd ask my OB about everything. Online. We had purchased a book early on, that was like focused on my husband, learning how to be like my coach to labor. And there it said to sign up for one of their childbirth courses. So we looked them up. And that's how we found our childbirth class. And from there, we got like midwives and doulas, a whole bunch of people that were, I guess the resource in a way we were able to reach out to them for even more information, after the course was over.

Auriluz: What were some things you thought would happen, but didn't?

Participant 1: We were not able to have visitors. Like the hospital, I went to have private rooms and their visitor policy was very, like relaxed. You could have visitors 24 hours a day. I thought it was awesome like the family could come see him and everything and then we could go home and just be home and not have so many people in the home. But that didn't happen because of corona. Nobody was able to come. Nobody was able to go to the lobby of the hospital to bring anything. Yeah, so we were kind of alone. I wish I had a better time for feeding. I guess that also refers to like the last question you asked, what I wish I had known. I wish I had known more about how low supply and struggles with breastfeeding could have troubleshooted them early rather than later.

Auriluz: Did you ever have a conversation with the healthcare provider on COVID?

Participant 1: Only when I was asked to quarantine.

Auriluz: Do you feel safe in medical settings?

Participant 1: Not really, not anymore.

Auriluz: And this was kind of obvious at this point but would you change anything about your experience?

Participant 1: Yes.

Auriluz: What is something you wish you could tell your hospital?

Participant 1: I wish to tell the hospital to not let OB's interfere in midwifery patients' care. I clearly stated I want midwives to take care of me. So I feel like the OB should not have been there. Midwives are trained in handling the complications that he stated I was having where my baby's heart rate was dropping, they know how to deal with that, hence why I would have trusted them to take care of him. I would tell them to seek consent. Even with the PCR, the only take away was I needed to cut you to help him get out quicker. And clearly I wasn't fully aware of what was going on but it would have been good to have been taken into consideration instead of just like a piece of meat that was just there and they were doing what they wanted. So definitely consent is important even in birth.

Auriluz: If you had the opportunity to receive something that would make your journey easier now or then what would you have like whether that be a resource, medical attention, classes?

Participant 1: What I've seen that has come up now is a lot of scholarships for home births and midwives/midwifery care. That would have been helpful to have and I'm happy that it's available to us now. Back then, I wish I had had more lactation consultants/ lactation support for breastfeeding and even now. I wish there had been more than one follow up. Like one before the six weeks because the first couple weeks were really, really hard.

Auriluz: What was hard about it is like the natural feeling of being pregnant?

Participant 1: Healing was hard, the emotions were hard. A lot of stuff was happening with my body that I didn't understand. And I had to reach out to people outside of the hospital to help. And just taking care of babies here at home.

Auriluz: Given all of your experience is there's any other information that you want to share or have any questions on? Anything you think I should include? any, like, Final Thoughts?

Participant 1: Not that I can think of. No, we covered everything.

Auriluz: Okay no problem. I really enjoyed our interview. Thank you so much for your honesty and transparency about everything I know it wasn't easy.

Participant 1: Yeah no problem, really quickly I think something other women can look into is the Birthing Place BX. it's a birthing center run by midwives, so that's another thing I would recommend you look into. It's supposed to be a birthing center run solely by people of color. So to also diminish the maternal mortality rate among like black people and people of color. So I would definitely recommend looking into that. I think it's called @birthingplacebx on Instagram.

Auriluz: Okay ill actually be looking into that myself right now too.

Participant 1: I'll send you the flyer.

Auriluz: Okay. Thank you so much. Again, I really appreciate this and your participation.

Participant 1: Thank you for doing this