The aim of this study was to describe women's feelings, attitudes and beliefs about different modes of childbirth. A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted at the obstetrics clinics of Ege University and Dr Ekrem Hayri Ustundag Obstetrics and Gynaecology Hospital in Izmir, Turkey. Three-hundred forty-two women who had given birth via spontaneous vaginal delivery (SVD) or caesarean section (C/S) between June and December 2009 voluntarily agreed to participate. Fifty-seven per cent of participants were aged 20–24. Sixty per cent of the women (n = 205) had undergone C/S during their last delivery; among these women, the birth method of 90% (n = 185) was decided by their doctors, whereas the remaining 10% (n = 20) made the decision themselves or with their partners. Sixty-three per cent (n = 250) of women who underwent C/S said that if they gave birth again, they would prefer to deliver via SVD. Eighty-eight per cent (n = 300) of women wanted the legal right to choose their birth method. Although the rate of C/S was high, most women stated that if given the choice, they would prefer a SVD if they had another child.