

Letter To TheEditor

Male Midwives Practicing: Barriers and Strategies in Promoting the acceptance

Dear Editor,

According to the International Confederation of Midwives (I.C.M.), a midwife is a person who has successfully completed a midwifery education programme that is based on the ICM Essential Competencies for Midwifery Practice and the framework of the ICM Global Standards for Midwifery Education and is recognized in the country where it is located; who has acquired the requisite qualifications to be registered and/or legally licensed to practice midwifery and use the title 'midwife'; and who demonstrates competency in the practice of midwifery(1). Midwifery is an ancient profession that has been practiced for centuries. It is an essential aspect of reproductive healthcare, especially during childbirth(2). A study conducted in South Africa suggested that, student male midwives were perceived to be uncomfortable conducting intimate clinical procedures, hence the struggle to attain the required clinical learning experiences when allocated in maternity wards(3). Midwives provide emotional, physical, and medical support to expectant mothers, ensuring safe and healthy childbirth. Traditionally, midwifery has been considered a female profession, but recently, male midwives have become more common in many parts of the world(4). A descriptive study conducted in 77 countries indicated that, 19 countries are there without male midwives, while 37 countries are with male midwives and other two countries explained training plans for male midwives considering their specific characteristics(5). Similarly, a study conducted in America reported that female midwives' beliefs that men belong in midwifery, as such gender does not compromise quality of care(6). However, male midwives still face significant challenges, particularly in cultural and religious sensitive areas. This editorial explores ways to increase the acceptance of male midwives practicing in cultural and religious sensitive areas.

Barriers of male Midwives Practicing

Following the inclusion of male into midwifery practice, there have been numerous challenges including the following:

1. Cultural Barriers: Cultural beliefs play a significant role in shaping attitudes towards male midwives. In many cultures, childbirth is considered a female-only affair, and men are

not allowed to be present during childbirth. Men practicing midwifery in these areas are seen as an intrusion of privacy and a violation of cultural norms. In some local communities, male midwives are prohibited from attending to women in labor. These beliefs make it challenging for males to practice midwifery, especially in communities where cultural beliefs are strictly adhered to.

2. **Religious Barriers:**Religious barriers are also a significant challenge facing males practicing midwifery. Some religious beliefs prohibit men from attending to female patients, especially during childbirth. For instance, in some conservative Muslim societies, men are not allowed to enter the room where childbirth is taking place(7). Similarly, some Christian sects believe that childbirth should be a female-only affair(8).
3. **Lack of role models and mentors in the field:** There are few male midwives in practice, and this can make it difficult for aspiring male midwives to find support and guidance(7).
4. **Discrimination and harassment from both colleagues and patients at work.**
Despite these challenges, some women believed that male midwives are patient and are very good in their work as compared to their female counterparts(7)

Strategies in promoting the acceptance of male midwives.

Due to the growing concern towards male midwives' practices, we believe that the following strategies could make people decipher the role of these professional and hence accept their services.

1. To overcome cultural barriers, it is essential to educate communities about the benefits of male midwifery. This can be achieved by involving traditional priest, community elders, and other influential people in the education process. Such education should highlight the need for male midwives and their positive contributions to maternal and child health. It is also important to emphasize the fact that male midwives do not interfere with the cultural practices of the communities they serve. **Training institutions should incorporate cultural diversity in teaching student male midwives in midwifery care to ensure that they are equipped with knowledge to render maternal health to women of different cultures(3)**
2. To overcome religious barriers, it is essential to involve religious leaders in the process of increasing acceptance of male midwives. This can be achieved by providing religious leaders with information about the benefits of male midwifery and how it aligns with the

teachings of their religion. It is also essential to show religious leaders that male midwives do not compromise the religious values of the communities they serve.

3. Health care providers and organizations can encourage male midwives to take on leadership roles and provide opportunities for mentorship and training. Additionally, it is crucial to promote the positive experiences and successes of male midwives to encourage more men to join the profession.
4. Health care providers and policymakers need to promote a culture of inclusivity and respect in the workplace. Training programs can be designed to teach health care providers about gender sensitivity and diversity, and policies can be put in place to prevent discrimination against male midwives.

Conclusion

Male midwives face significant challenges in cultural and religious sensitive areas. However, to increase the acceptance of male midwives in cultural and religious sensitive areas, education and awareness campaigns are essential. Midwifery associations, healthcare providers, and governments should collaborate to educate the public on the role of male midwives in reproductive healthcare. This education should focus on dispelling myths and misconceptions about male midwives and highlight their skills, experience, and qualifications. The education campaign should be tailored to specific communities and address their cultural and religious concerns. By increasing awareness and education, communities will be more accepting of male midwives and this will lead to better health outcomes for expectant mothers, improved gender equality, and a more diverse midwifery workforce.

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