



Scope and Significance of the Midwifery Profession in Pakistan

Bakhtawar M Hanif Khowaja^{1*}; Quratulain M Hanif Khowaja²; Faiza Sattar¹; Musarrat Rani³; Mehmooda Afroz Ali Khowaja⁴

¹Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, The Aga Khan University-Stadium Road, PO Box 350, Karachi, Pakistan.

²Department of South City Hospital, Karachi, Pakistan.

³Department of Midwifery Association of Pakistan, Islamabad, Pakistan.

⁴Department of Lady Dufferin Hospital, School of Midwifery, Karachi, Pakistan.

***Corresponding Author(s): Bakhtawar M Hanif**

Khowaja

Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, The Aga Khan University-Stadium Road, PO Box 350, Karachi, Pakistan.

Email: bakhtawarshalwani92@gmail.com

Abstract

Based on the evidence of a positive association between community midwives and a decrease in maternal mortality rates, the CMWs program was established in Pakistan in 2006 to institute home-based clinics for rural community women, however, the scope and significance of midwives are still questionable. We, therefore, present the findings on the scope and the significance of community midwives that were collected and analyzed as part of a qualitative study on factors influencing community midwives' services in Pakistan. The scope and significance of community midwives are well-recognized in rural communities of Pakistan. The midwifery profession is considered a noble profession and community people recognize them as obstetricians. The 'only girls' profession' motivates parents to enroll their girls into this program and this inbuilt female empowerment in the patriarchal society of the country.

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Background

The word 'midwife' means 'with woman' [1]. Midwifery is an ancient practice from the time of early Egyptian and Roman times and has gained global attention today [2]. The history of Sweden midwives has been well recognized and is a noteworthy example [3]. The intense reduction in maternal mortality in Sweden during the last century has been associated with the role of midwifery services [4]. This has been achieved through midwives' contribution to all aspects of women's health care and their involvement in the health system [5].

Most countries such as Cuba, Iran, China, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Malaysia have followed a similar path and have attained a significant reduction in their maternal mortality ratio, by giving high credibility to the profession of midwifery [6]. Evidence suggests that the introduction of midwifery-led models can reduce primary and maternity care providers' deficiencies to address geographic health inequalities [7].

Based on the evidence of a positive association between community midwives and a decrease in maternal mortality rates, the CMWs program was established in Pakistan in 2006 to institute home-based clinics for rural community women [8].



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The community midwifery program was organized into the health system of Pakistan around two decades ago however [8], the scope and significance of midwives are still questionable. We, therefore, conducted a qualitative study to explore the factors influencing community midwives' services in rural district Thatta, Pakistan using the community midwifery model, the study protocols and procedures have been published elsewhere [9]. We identified several facilitating and hindering factors for community midwives' services. The main findings have been published as a separate record [10].

The detailed data on the theme of the scope and the significance of community midwives were collected and analyzed however it was missed out in the main findings. This was because we used the Community Midwifery (CMW) model as a framework approach for reporting our study findings and this theme was not included in the CMW framework [11], hence, we believe that the information on the scope and significance of CMWs is important and could play a significant part in developing policies to improve midwifery services in rural areas of Pakistan.

Main body

The midwifery profession is achieving progression with time in different parts of the world [13]. Yet, this paper reports the scope and significance of midwives in particular for one province of Pakistan namely 'Sindh'.

Significance of CMWs

Midwives are easily accessible

The skillset and knowledge learned during midwifery training are beneficial for the community and the midwife herself. Midwives learn important aspects of perinatal care and newborn care and are distinguished globally as skilled birth attendants. The perinatal services in rural areas are considered a challenge due to access to hospitals and health facilities, therefore midwives could be easily approachable and accessible in local communities to provide services to pregnant and postnatal women.

A noble profession

Midwifery is recognized as a noble profession and holds a strong standing in the list of honorable professions around the world. The profession provides female autonomy and upliftment to young girls who enroll in this program. Moreover, the girls of rural communities of Low Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) including Pakistan are not encouraged to advancement in education and career, hence midwifery schools enroll only girls in this program and the non-entry of boys in their schools satisfies parents to allow their girls to opt for midwifery education.

Admission and enrolment process

The eligibility criterion for midwifery training is straightforward as compared to other programs. Some private institutions also guarantee job opportunities in their health settings after completion of their training. The struggle for jobs and bread earning is a major challenge in all LMICs and especially in Pakistan. The guaranteed jobs after training facilitate girls toward midwifery training.

Scope of CMWs

Equivalent to obstetricians

Midwives provide optimistic views about their status as obstetricians. The low education status in rural communities of

the people makes them pay tribute to those who have even a little knowledge about deliveries, newborn care, and antenatal care as obstetricians.

Gaining recognition in other fields

Many midwives working in other fields still recognize their association of current jobs with midwifery training. They work in other fields such as research assistants, field officers, and other related jobs due to their background in midwifery training.

Conclusions

We have already identified factors that influence community midwives' services in rural areas of Pakistan [10]. In this paper, we identified that the significance and scope of community midwives are remarkable in rural areas of Pakistan.

The midwifery profession is considered a noble profession and community people recognize them as obstetricians. Another positive dimension that was acknowledged is its recognition as the 'only girls' profession'. This helps parents enroll their daughters in the program because the safety and security of their daughters are assured. Moreover, the training uplifts female education considering in rural patriarchal communities.

Midwifery education is building bridges and opportunities for professionals to excel in their professions as well as in other fields of different scopes. The increased recognition of this program and profession could bring about betterment in the society where midwives would hold a strong standpoint.

The scope and significance of midwifery are well-recognized in rural areas of Pakistan. However, future studies could better help us in understanding the training and fieldwork of community midwives in Pakistan and other developing countries.

Abbreviations

CMWs: Community Midwives; LMICs: Low Middle-Income Countries.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Ethical approval to conduct the study was given by the Aga Khan University Ethical Review Committee (2020-3391-11138).

Consent for publication

Verbal informed consent for publication was obtained from all study participants who were part of the original study from which data have been extracted.

Availability of data and materials

All data generated or analyzed during this current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Authors' contributions

BK is an MSc Health Policy and Management Programme student at the Aga Khan University, Community Health Sciences Department, Karachi, Pakistan. The manuscript has been pre-

pared from her thesis work. BK and QK prepared the first draft of the manuscript. MR and MK provided the data for preparing the manuscript and reviewed the manuscript. BK, QK and FS revised the final draft of the manuscript. All the authors reviewed the final manuscript.

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