

2nd International Meeting On

NURSING RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE BASED PRACTICE

March 19-20, 2018 | Singapore City, Singapore

Exploring disrespect and abuse of childbearing women during childbirth in Zimbabwe

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Introduction: Kruk, et .al, (2009) report that Disrespect and Abuse (D & A) in maternity care facilities are among the biggest barriers to women seeking maternal health services and closely linked to high maternal and neonatal mortality burden. Studies done in different settings have also reported D & A as a problem. Abuya, et al (2015) conducted a study in Kenya and reported that 20% of women experienced D & A. Sethi, et.al (2017) reported the same problem with a prevalence ranging from 0.09 to 93.7% in Malawi. In Tanzania, the prevalence was 15% in post-partum and 70% in community follow-up (Sando et al, 2016). These study findings reveal that D & A during maternity care as a big challenge and it shows a serious violation of universal rights of child bearing women.

Problem Statement: The media and public continue to report complaints about the treatment of women when they seek maternity care in Zimbabwe. Women 's experiences of D & A in maternity care environments result in lasting emotional trauma and fear of delivery in health facilities. D &A of women is a serious problem which involves non-compliance to human rights by health care providers.

Objectives: The survey sought to:

- Determine whether disrespect and abuse of women during child birth in maternity care facilities is a problem in Zimbabwe.
- Identify the types of disrespect and abuse of women during childbirth in maternity care facilities.

Methodology: A quanti-qualitative research design was used and information was collected from midwives attending the Zimbabwe Confederation of Midwives (ZICOM) Scientific Conference and postnatal mothers who had come for postnatal care at two local City Health Department clinics in Harare in 2016. Midwives were from the 10 provinces of Zimbabwe and were asked to respond to the interview questions in writing. A video was recorded during focused group discussions with the postnatal mothers.

Sample Characteristics: Female dominated sample of 73 midwives with varying years of experience and 50 postnatal mothers aged 16-45 years.

Data Collection: Midwives were given a sheet of paper to put their responses in writing and responses from the postnatal mothers were video-recorded. Two open-ended questions were asked to collect data and these were:

- Is disrespect and abuse of women during child birth in maternity care facilities a problem in Zimbabwe?
- What types of disrespect and abuse of women during childbirth in maternity care facilities have you observed?

Data Analysis:

- Content analysis was done
- Process: classifying categories of DISRESPECT and ABUSE encountered by childbearing women during maternity care.

Findings: The survey highlights that D & A is a problem in Zimbabwe. It revealed that women's human rights were violated at health facilities during childbirth by nurses and midwives; verbal and physical abuse being most commonly reported.

Recommendations:

- Raising awareness on the universal rights of childbearing women
- Advocating for respectful maternity care and zero tolerance to D & A
- All health care providers especially midwives should be encouraged to ensure that every woman's right to RMC is upheld.
- Integration of respectful maternity care into pre-service and in-service education

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