



**PERCEPTION OF RESPECTFUL MATERNAL CARE AMONG HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS WHO UNDERWENT VAGINAL DELIVERY**

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**ABSTRACT**

Respectful Maternal Care refers to an aspect of obstetric care, which enables all pregnant women to being treated with humanity and respect, even when they make a decision that may not be what a care provider recommends. It is now described as a universal right that encompasses the principles of ethics and respect for the woman's feelings, dignity, choices and preferences. Ideally, levels of respectful maternal care provided to healthcare professionals (specifically doctors and nurses) should have been much higher than what the general population experiences. This assumption was made taking into account the general awareness and knowledge held by healthcare professionals in regard to the entire process of childbirth. The reasons responsible for this ideal situation not being accomplished were assessed using a semi-qualitative study questionnaire based on the Childbirth Experience Questionnaire, administered to healthcare professionals who underwent vaginal delivery and were matched with the 12 aspects of respectful maternal care as published in the International Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

**KEYWORDS :** Respectful Maternal Care, Healthcare Professionals, Vaginal Delivery, Qualitative, Pregnant

**INTRODUCTION**

Respectful Maternal Care is an approach centered on a patient, based on principles of ethics and respect for human rights, and promotes practices that recognize a woman's preferences and needs. [1] It refers to the humane and dignified treatment of a childbearing woman throughout her pregnancy, birth and the period following birth. [2] It is now considered as a basic human right.

According to hospital base studies, 65.38% of women in the India face some form of ill treatment during childbirth. The highest reported forms of ill treatment were non-consent, verbal abuse, physical abuse, discrimination and lack of privacy. [3]

Women's experience with maternity caregivers can either be empowering and comforting or can inflict lasting damage and deep emotional trauma. [4] Therefore, it is a must that healthcare professionals in all health systems around the world must advocate for and include principles of respectful maternal care in their day-to-day practice.

Healthcare professionals, specifically doctors and nurses, are more aware of the entire process of childbirth and post-delivery care, and the rights of patients involved. Taking this into account, the levels of perceived respectful maternal care are expected to be higher in this population. Ideally, every healthcare professional should perceive their labor to be dignified. But this is not the case.



**Figure 1:** Respectful Maternal Care Charter Assets Logo (White Ribbon Alliance)

Sources: [www.white-ribbon-alliance.com](http://www.white-ribbon-alliance.com)

Gynecology published by the Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynecology, there are 12 aspects of respectful maternal care [5]-

1	Being free from harm and mistreatment
2	Maintaining privacy/confidentiality
3	Preserving dignity
4	Provision of information and obtaining consent
5	Continuous access to family support
6	Enhancing quality of physical environment/resources
7	Providing equitable care
8	Engaging with effective communication
9	Respecting a woman's choice that strengthen their capability to give birth.
10	Availability of competent/motivated human resources
11	Provision of efficient and effective care
12	Continuity of care

Cesarean section, like most operative procedures, involves a good amount of pre-operative counseling and communication, and lesser amount of doctor patient interaction than a vaginal delivery. As evidenced in a study, 91.3% of mothers undergoing the operative procedure knew the necessity, 95.6% were informed about the benefits and 94.62% about the risks involved. [6] Thus, it becomes more important to focus on the provision of dignity in women undergoing vaginal delivery.

The Childbirth Experience Questionnaire is a valuable tool in the research of aspects related to Respectful Maternal Care. It shows good sensitivity between all 4 of it's dimensions and is shown to adequately measure important dimensions of childbirth experience. [7]

**Case Study**

In the present semi-qualitative study, the Childbirth Experience Questionnaire was administered to 30 healthcare providers (doctors and nurses) who underwent vaginal delivery, and their responses were recorded.

The responses recorded were analyzed to compare the levels of perceived dignified labour among doctors and nursing staff.

Along with this, feedback was taken on what measures could have been adopted to make the process of labor more

As stated in the International Journal of Obstetrics and

dignified and in line with the aspects of respectful maternal care as published by RCOG.

## OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study included-

1. To find out ways in which the healthcare providers who underwent vaginal delivery thought the process of labor can be made more dignified for the mother.
2. To compare the levels of respectful maternal care between doctors and nursing staff

## METHODOLOGY

In this semi-qualitative case study, the Childbirth Experience Questionnaire was administered to 30 healthcare professionals (doctors and nurses) and responses were recorded.

The questionnaire records the responses of the subjects on a 4-point Likert Scale ranging from 1(Strongly agree), 2(Agree), 3(Disagree) to 4(Totally Disagree) in 4 broad aspects of childbirth including own capacity, professional support, perceived safety and participation, covering the various aspects of Respectful Maternal Care as mentioned in BJOG.

Their feedback was matched to the 12 aspects of Respectful Maternal Care as published by the RCOG and the aspects that were not being upheld were identified.

Feedback was also recorded on their perspective of changes that could be made to make the process of labor more dignified.

The following were calculated-

- a. Percentage of healthcare providers who perceived their labor to be dignified
- b. Comparison of this perception between doctors and nurses
- c. Comparison of this perception between private and government set-ups (where delivery took place)

Criteria for inclusion of the candidates included healthcare professionals, i.e doctors and nurses, who underwent vaginal delivery. No bar was put on age, set-up/place of delivery, time since delivery or specialty/field. Those who underwent a C-section were not included.

## RESULTS

As per the study carried out, it was found that 66.6% of healthcare providers (including doctors and nurses) perceived their labor to be dignified.

Comparing the populations, it was seen that 80% of doctors perceive labor to be dignified as compared to 46.6% of nursing staff. Thus, doctors perceive the process of labor they went through to be dignified more than the nursing staff.

77.7% of healthcare professionals undergoing vaginal delivery in private facilities perceived their labor to be dignified, as compared to 50% of healthcare professionals undergoing the same in government facilities.

According to the healthcare professionals who were a part of the study, the following methods were put forth, which, according to them, would help provide mothers more dignity during the process of labor-

1. Better communication about the process of labor and the things involved
2. Provision of more privacy during the process
3. Taking consent throughout the process
4. Provision of more individualized care (spending more time with each patient)
5. Showing more empathy during the entire process

Thus, the aspects of Respectful Maternal Care as per RCOG that are lacking and thus need to be worked on in provision of maternal care include-

- I. Maintaining privacy/confidentiality
- ii. Provision of information and gaining consent
- iii. Engaging with effective communication

In contrast, the aspects that, according to the healthcare professionals, were upheld well, included-

- i. Availability of competent/motivated human resources
- ii. Continuity of care
- iii. Providing equitable care

When a comparison was drawn out between doctors and nurses, it was seen that the aspect of engaging with effective communication seemed to be lacking according to doctors, whereas the aspect of maintaining privacy/confidentiality seemed to be lacking according to nursing staff. Both the groups felt the aspect of provision of information and gaining consent to be lacking.

## DISCUSSION

The WHO Intrapartum Care guidelines highlight Respectful Maternal Care as a key recommendation. [8]

The prevalence of disrespect and abuse during labor and childbirth is well documented in low- and middle-income countries. Various different types of abuse have been identified, the most common being verbal abuse and neglect. [9]

Respectful maternity care focuses on eliminating disrespectful care, adaptation of safe care practices, health maintenance for all, preservation and support of the physiological process of childbirth and caregiving. [10] It is now considered as a basic human right, playing an important role in preserving the dignity of a mother.

A cross-sectional study carried out in three different healthcare settings in Delhi, India stated that 98% of patients experienced some sort of disrespect during labor and childbirth, as high as 98% reported lack of privacy, 76% reported lack of support, and 93% reported lack of communication, which is in accordance to the above study. [11]

In another cross-sectional study carried out across India, it was found that every woman included as a subject faced one or the other type of disrespect during childbirth. It was also found that women from the lower wealth index, lesser number of antenatal visits in the same setting as where they delivered and those with low food security faced more amount of disrespect. Non-consented care and non-confidential care were the most common types of disrespect. [12]

Multi component interventions are found effectively reduce the mistreatment faced by women during childbirth. [13]

Training on values, transforming attitudes, and inculcating good interpersonal communication skills were seen as important methods to improve respect during childbirth. [14] Availability of good health infrastructure and adequate number of service providers are found to be important in creating an environment required to provided individualized respectful maternal care. Setting expectations, training, modeling and mentoring healthcare providers in interpersonal communication skills, empathy and patient's rights will go a long way in improving quality of care during childbirth. [15]

In conclusion, directing attention to aspects of respectful maternal care has become an important aspect, not only when

talking about women's rights but also to improve quality of healthcare provided. Attention has to be drawn to provision of privacy and improvement of communication skills.

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