

MIDWIFERY SCOPE OF PRACTICE

Introduction

Pregnancy and childbirth are considered normal life events, and the midwife has been identified as the most suitable and cost-effective healthcare professional to provide care in normal pregnancy and childbirth, including risk assessment and recognition of complications (CMO, 2008). Midwife-led continuity of care has been associated with positive outcomes, including reduced maternal and neonatal morbidity, reduced stillbirths, reduced interventions in labour, improved psycho-social outcomes, and increased birth spacing and contraceptive use (Sandall et al., 2016).

The State of the World's Midwifery Report that is published by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) showed that midwives, when educated, licensed, and fully integrated into and supported by interdisciplinary teams in an enabling environment, can deliver essential Sexual, Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, and Adolescent Health (SRMNAH) interventions across the life course, can provide a wide range of clinical interventions, and can contribute to broader health goals.

'A midwife is a person who has successfully completed a midwifery education programme that is based on the International Council of Midwifery (ICM) Essential Competencies for Basic 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" by the licensing body; and who demonstrates competency in the practice of midwifery' (ICM, 2017).

The midwife is recognized as a responsible and accountable professional who works in partnership with women to give the necessary support, care, and advice during pregnancy, labour, and the postpartum period, to conduct births on the midwife's own responsibility, and to provide care for newborns and infants. This care includes preventative measures, the promotion of normal birth, the detection of complications in mother and child, the accessing of medical care or other appropriate assistance, and the carrying out of emergency measures. The midwife has an important task in health counselling and education, not only for the woman but also within the family and the community. This work should involve antenatal education and preparation for parenthood and may extend to women's health, sexual or reproductive health, and child care. A midwife may practise in any setting, including the home, community, hospitals, clinics, or health units (ICM, 2017).

A midwife who is allowed to use the full range of her skills can positively affect maternal and perinatal morbidity and mortality rates (ICM, 2013). Recent research documents the potential impact of midwives in preventing and reducing maternal and new-born mortality and stillbirths and reveals that investing in midwives could save millions of lives (Nove et al., 2021).

The ICM (2013) concepts that define the unique role of midwives focus on the following:

- Health promotion and disease prevention strategies that view pregnancy as a normal life event.
- Partnership with families to promote self-care and the health of mothers, new-borns, and families.
- Respect for human dignity, family, and mothers as persons with full human rights, and advocacy for women and the amplification of their voices.
- Cultural sensitivity, including working with family and healthcare providers to overcome those cultural practices that harm women and babies.
- Advocacy for normal physiological labour and birth to enhance best outcomes for mothers and new-borns.

Domains of Competence for Midwifery

These core competencies have been developed to ensure that the public of Saudi Arabia can be confident in the abilities of midwives to provide safe and effective midwifery care. Eight domains of practice have been identified.

1. Professionalism and Ethical Practice
2. Family-Centred Care
3. Evidence-Based Practice and Research
4. Leadership and Management Skills
5. Quality and Safety Management
6. Health Education and Promotion
7. Communication and Information Technology
8. Professional Self-Development

Each domain is described through competency standards and associated performance criteria that define the requirements that are expected and demanded of the registered midwife.