

RESPECTFUL MATERNITY CARE (RMC)

Saadia Shamsher

Pregnancy, labour, and birth are life-changing physiologic processes for most women and their families that benefit from collaboration between health care practitioners delivering maternity care. Multidisciplinary education and teamwork – including communication, collaboration, consultation and referral – are essential to ensuring optimal care for women and babies, especially those with obstetric-neonatal risk, or when obstetric-neonatal complications occur.

FIGO (International Federation of Obstetrics and Gynecology) has given the Principle of beneficence, the Principle of nonmaleficence, the Principle of justice, and the Principle of autonomy of the patients in detail

Respectful maternity care (RMC)

It is a fundamental human right for all women. RMC is defined as care that maintains dignity, privacy, and confidentiality of pregnant and birthing women, ensures freedom from harm and mistreatment, and enables informed choice and continuous support during labor and birth¹. The Respectful Maternity Care Charter addresses the issue of disrespect and abuse toward women and newborns who are utilizing maternal and newborn care services and provides a platform for improvement by:

- Raising awareness for women's and newborns' human rights guarantees that are recognized in internationally adopted United Nations and other multinational declarations, conventions and covenants;
- Highlighting the connection between human rights guarantees and healthcare delivery relevant to maternal and newborn healthcare;
- Increasing the capacity of maternal, newborn and child health advocates to participate in human rights processes;
- Aligning women's demand for high-quality maternal and newborn care with international human rights law standards;
- Providing a foundation for holding governments, the maternity care system and communities accountable to these rights;
- Supporting healthcare workers in providing respectful care to women and newborns and creating a healthy working environment.

RMC prioritizes autonomy and rights of women throughout the entire childbirth journey.

RMC should be a primary goal for all healthcare providers, but women often experience disrespectful and abusive practices during pregnancy and childbirth across global contexts, especially in low and middle-income countries².

1. Everyone has the right to freedom from harm and ill-treatment.
2. Everyone has the right to information, informed consent, and respect for their choices and preferences, including companion of choice during maternity care and refusal of medical procedures.
3. Everyone has the right to privacy and confidentiality
4. Everyone is their own person from the moment of birth and has the right to be treated with dignity and respect.
5. Everyone has the right to equality, freedom from discrimination and equitable care.
6. Everyone has the right to healthcare and to the highest attainable level of health
7. Everyone has the right to liberty, autonomy, self-determination and freedom from arbitrary detention.
8. Every child has the right to be with their parents or guardians.
9. Every child has the right to an identity and nationality from birth.
10. Everyone has the right to adequate nutrition and clean water.

While some women tend to view such practices as 'normative', acknowledging that healthcare professionals did not intend to cause harm by such behaviors, others describe these practices as devaluing and dehumanizing to their sense of dignity, expressing an inherent lack of choice and an underlying sense of helplessness³.

Studies have demonstrated links between disrespectful and abusive care and adverse maternal and infant health outcomes such as postpartum hemorrhage, physical injuries to the mother or new-born, and psychological consequences such as post-traumatic stress, post-natal blues, suicidal ideation, and feelings of helplessness⁴.

It has been indicated that such practices can hamper mothers' trust in the health system, leading to poor health-seeking behavior, delayed access to health facilities and an

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increase in the rate of births with unskilled attendants⁵.

Accumulated evidence has supported the development of international guidelines for the implementation of respectful maternity care programs⁶. These guidelines include evidence-based recommendations that aim to improve the quality of intrapartum care and postnatal care with the ultimate aim of improving maternal and new-born health and well-being⁶. All the guidelines emphasize giving women a positive

maternity care experience as a key endpoint for women who access the service. This experience is defined as one in which everybody, including significant others who accompany the woman to the health facility, receive consistent support from motivated health workers who respect the cultural context in which they operate⁷.

Seven Rights of Childbearing Women

S.NO.	Category of Disrespect and Abuse	Corresponding Right
1	Physical abuse	Freedom from harm and ill treatment
2	Non-consented care	Right to information, informed consent, and refusal, and respect for choices and preferences, including companionship during maternity care
3	Non-confidential care	Confidentiality, privacy
4	Non-dignified care (including verbal abuse)	Dignity, respect
5	Discrimination based on specific attributes	Equality, freedom from discrimination, equitable care
6	Abandonment or denial of care	Right to timely healthcare and to the highest attainable level of health
7	Detention in facilities	Liberty, autonomy, self-determination, and freedom from coercion

Despite increasing acknowledgment of the importance of RMC for optimal maternal and new-born outcomes, there is limited evidence on the uptake of RMC, particularly in low-resource settings. This knowledge gap is driven by the failure of routine health information systems and facility assessments to capture data on RMC practices. However, despite this limitation, existing studies, which frequently use in-person observations (e.g., of labor and delivery settings), show sub-optimal application of RMC. For example, observations have shown that while women tended to be treated with dignity overall, numerous poor interactions were identified, from a lack of provision of adequate information to birthing women to physical and verbal abuse.

Thus, several challenges to the application of RMC remain. One primary challenge is a lack of evidence-based health care provider training and resources on RMC, which leads to poor awareness and knowledge of RMC standards and practices as well as negative attitudes and poor adherence. There is also a lack of education for women themselves, in terms of their awareness of their right to information, informed consent, and respect for their preferences and choices. In low-resource settings in particular, additional challenges are frequently infrastructural and include inadequate facilities for implementation of RMC practices, such as insufficient space (e.g., to

provide birthing women with privacy or free movement while they labor) and inadequate staffing (e.g., to support patient preferences and shared decision-making, and to communicate patient needs across providers). It is vital to prevent disrespect and abuse in maternity care to ensure the well-being of pregnant and birthing women and their babies. Respecting women's right to freedom from harm, providing compassionate care, and fostering a supportive environment are essential for positive birth experiences and healthy outcomes. Therefore, this Collection, 'Respectful maternity care,' aims to provide the global scientific community with more granular evidence about the state of respect, autonomy, dignity, privacy and confidentiality in the continuum of maternity care. Moreover, evidence on feto-maternal and neonatal health impacts of maternal disrespect and abuse are welcome in the Collection. The role of RMC in mitigating global maternal and neonatal mortality and morbidity, and its relationship with the Sustainable Development Goals agenda, is a key part of the Collection's purpose.

In Islam, pregnancy is considered a blessing from Allah, and a time to express gratitude. Islamic point of view in my opinion the lesson given by our prophet Muhammad PBUH uswaehasana which is needed in every step of life but it is highly recommended in obstetrics

and gynae during dealing of labouring patients and mothers specially.

The Quraan mentions the care and attention required during pregnancy and child birth. We read the words of Allah, "And if they carry, then spend on them until they deliver their burden..." (Quran 65:6-7)

The family must devote a portion of their resources for a safe pregnancy. The Quran acknowledges the difficulty of childbirth and the physical and emotional pain that mothers experience.

It also emphasizes the importance of showing kindness to mothers and respecting the womb that bore you. The Quran also mentions the difficulty of childbirth. "We have enjoined man to show kindness to his parents. His mother bears him, and with much pain she brings him into the world..." (Quran 46:15).

Childbirth is a difficult task that must be approached seriously and carefully. Islam emphasizes modesty and privacy, especially between genders. The physical, psychological, and spiritual synergy that builds during pregnancy can significantly impact the outcome of labor. This Charter aims to address the issue of disrespect and abuse among women seeking maternity care and provide a platform for improvement by

Raising awareness of childbearing women
Highlighting the connection between human rights and maternity care;
Providing a basis for holding the maternal care system and communities accountable to these rights.

Notably, barriers to the implementation of respectful maternity care and strategic approaches to deal with the challenges will be covered. Thus, it is our earnest call to researchers whose work aligns with the purposes and aims of the Collection, to advance the scientific discourse with their evidence for improving maternal and neonatal health globally. This Editorial points to the need for development of international guidelines for the implementation of RMC programs globally.

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