

Resource C: Caring Behaviours—Research findings and Other Information

The following information can be used in a discussion with participants or to create a presentation for the participants.

- ✚ The Safe Motherhood Initiative, which brought the high maternal mortality and morbidity to the public's attention, has focused increasingly on improving access to and increasing utilization of skilled attendance at childbirth.
- ✚ Patient satisfaction with care is an important element of quality care, and there is growing evidence that patient-perceived quality of maternal health services—particularly provider attitudes and behaviour—has significant influence on women's willingness to use skilled maternity care.
- ✚ An emerging theory suggests that “interpersonal competence” and “intercultural competence” for skilled providers may be as important as technical competence, at least from the perspective of patient satisfaction with maternity care.
- ✚ The core competencies, or essential skills, for skilled care providers outlined by the Safe Motherhood Inter-Agency Group (IAG) have been expanded to include courteous, respectful, individualised care during birth, as well as awareness of cultural differences—in other words, caring behaviours.
- ✚ Health professionals tend to view competent clinical care as quality care, while patients also consider caring and interpersonal interactions when defining quality care.
- ✚ Many studies indicate that problems related to maternal provider behaviour and attitudes are a major barrier to utilisation of skilled childbirth care.
- ✚ For a number of years, research has documented increasing neglect, verbal abuse, and intentional humiliation of women during childbirth.
- ✚ Research in many settings has shown that negative perceptions about the quality of services, including inattentive, disrespectful staff behaviour, lack of cooperation and lack of privacy constitute serious barriers to care and contribute to underutilisation of public health facilities.

Summary: Midwives, physicians and other maternity care providers must work harder to treat women in labour (and all patients) as they themselves would want to be treated as patients. It is a moral and ethical responsibility to use caring behaviours with patients. Caring behaviour is also included among the core competencies of health providers. Lastly, improved caring behaviours will increase patient satisfaction, improve the quality of care provided and increase the number of women and families who utilise skilled birth attendants; thus decreasing maternal and infant mortality.

What is "Caring" Care: Feedback from women, men and other community members

In a qualitative survey conducted with women, men, and other community members in Homabay and Migori District, Kenya, the majority of interviewees who made mention of the subject of caring behaviour expressed a strong bias towards TBAs. Skilled Attendants were described at worst as physically and emotionally abusive and at best as neglectful.

In general, skilled attendants are recognised as more skilled than TBAs and a necessary intervention in cases of birthing complications. They are, however, feared and disliked for their notoriously poor treatment of women. This treatment serves as a major barrier to seeking facility-based care for community members.

Chief among the complaints made by women and other community members are the disrespectful attitudes of facility-based providers. Nurses/midwives were described as abusive, cruel, impatient, unsympathetic and insulting. Several described nurses as effectively telling maternity patients that their discomfort was "self-inflicted" (i.e. that the nurse did not cause the pregnancy). Comments from community members included:

Sometimes I sit with women and hear how they discuss; there is a particular female nurse in Migori that is very rough to women. Female nurses keep on telling them that they were not present when they were having the pregnancy. (FGD,¹ Men)

At times the language used by the health workers is not good. I witnessed a case in which one of them told the woman, 'I was not there when you were getting pregnant.' Such words are not kind.... The shyness comes from the insults they overhear the nurses tell other patients. (FGD, Community leaders)

There are some skilled attendants who will tell you that they are not your husband and they didn't make you pregnant. This will hurt the woman and so she will prefer to go to the TBA. (FGD, Community elders)

And also there are times when women cannot access those health facilities even if they are near, because of the attitude of the skilled care providers towards them. This has been necessitated by the kind of speech directed at the patients like insults would drive away women to those who treat them with dignity and respect. Such treatment makes mothers fearful of seeking care at health facilities... TBAs also give the mothers proper attention during the whole process of labour and delivery. (FGD, Community elders)

Nurses are very rude and mistreat people...Nurses give substandard treatment at the hospital while the TBA handles you soothingly. (FGD, Women)

I like anybody who would handle me politely without quarrelling. The nurses at times quarrel people. But I like a nurse who does not necessarily hurry you up...She {nurse} may also rough you up...Some female nurses that rough you up to an extent that you can tell her to let you deliver alone. You are in pain and all she does is give you harsh and rude approach. That is why I don't go to the hospital to deliver because I am not used to somebody who roughs me up. That is why I like somebody who would handle me with care because at that moment you are in pain you need somebody to soothe you not one who roughs you. (FGD, Women)

The nurse talked to me in a bad way. (Woman with obstetric complications)

¹ "FDG" indicates that the quote is taken from a focus group discussion participant. Unless indicated as such, quotes are taken from individual interviews.

[Female skilled attendants] are normally cruel...They nag patients. (Woman of reproductive age)

Q: Did they tell you what caused the complication? A: *They didn't tell me anything, they just scolded 'that why come to the hospital early'. If I had gone to the hospital early my baby could not have died. (Woman with obstetric complications)*

According to today's economy, what prevents women from using skilled attendants is the exorbitant prices charged at the hospital coupled with the harassment that the women undergo once they reach there. (FGD, Men)

Comments from some community members revealed that they perceive facility-based providers as discriminating and condescending:

When a woman is pregnant, she is usually impatient and when she does not receive good care at the hospital, she becomes embarrassed and so turns to using a TBA who will treat her well. There are some women who can't even afford maternity dresses and so they should not discriminate against such women. (FGD, Community elders)

Nurses are choosy on whom to attend to first and who to see later. (Husband)

Doctors also despise patients instead of helping them. So [women] fear going to hospital because of abuses so it's better to have a TBA. (FGD, Community elders)

She just came quarrelling me and that instilled fear in me. And even when I was delivering, I delivered with a lot of ear. So in my opinion when I compared it with the TBA, the TBA really sympathised with me. The district attendants really harass us and in fact we fear them, those of us who go to the hospital. Not all health workers are good. Some of them are 'extra rude.' Some just see you and make a conclusion immediately that this one is illiterate and uninformed. You will really wonder and this can even make you not go back to that particular hospital. (FGD, Women)

In addition to verbal abuse, some community members reported that women are physically abused by health workers:

Q: Who abuses them? A: *The female health workers. At times they go so far as beating them. (FGD, Community leaders)*

Some women also say that they fear going to the hospital because they are normally beaten. (FGD, Community elders)

When I went to the hospital, the nurses mistreated me...Nurses are very rude and mistreat people. Nurses give substandard treatment at the hospital. (FGD, Women)

Interestingly, many respondents singled out female nurses as abusive, and sometimes perceived male attendants as kinder/more caring.

Many times the women say female nurses are merciless but their male colleagues are better. (FGD, Community leaders)

Another theme that emerged in respondents' descriptions of their interactions with formal sector health workers is outright neglect. Community members reported that they were not given sufficient attention, food or information about their condition.

You just call [for the nurse] until you get tired and then you finally deliver by yourself and die. I have even witnessed it myself. (Female elder)

She will be neglected [by medical staff]...she is not attended to properly and no more attention given. (Husband)

Q: How do health workers and other staff treat women and their family members? A: *Some don't give you enough food. Instead of giving you the baby milk, they drink it. If you want good treatment it is better you get to the private wing. (FGD, Women)*

In the delivery of my last-born daughter, I went straight to the hospital and what I saw there made me cry. When I reached there, I knew that the delivery time had reached. She was taken in and she was in great pain but these skilled attendants were just laughing and nobody saw that what was happening could bring about the baby's death and also the mother's death...The baby died, but what really hurt me was the fact that they were watching and just laughing...placed her in the hands of a skilled attendant because I knew he was trained for that job but then he refused that there was nobody present to deliver her, so he told her to go and give birth in the toilet. (Community elder)

Some of the health providers appeared to be aware of how they were perceived by community members, and one nurse admitted that patients sometimes misunderstand her actions:

Q: What are the barriers to going to the hospital? A: *Sometimes, the attitudes of the nurses. So when they come, someone came when they are dirty, you try to advise and then she feels you are abusing. (Skilled attendant)*

In contrast to facility-based providers, both childbearing women and community members appreciate TBAs. They are described as loving, soothing, patient and flexible (i.e. in terms of payment). Many women mentioned TBA's kindnesses, describing their positive interactions with worried husbands and family members, as well as other small yet significant indications of caring behaviours (making tea, massaging the woman's back, taking her children to be cared for by neighbours during delivery). Reference is likewise made to their attentiveness throughout labour and the care they provide after delivery (e.g. bathing with warm water, herbs to reduce pain, etc.).

On the part of women's deliveries, most of them like TBAs because they go to the hospital [and] most of them complain that the nurses there just neglect them. (Focus group discussion, Men)

"She was very responsible and the care was good. She (the TBA) gave me cotton wool, hot water and food. (Woman of reproductive age)

She talked to me nicely; she also gave me an herb that cleared the severe abdominal pains I had after delivery. (Woman of reproductive age)

When you give birth at home you might get a TBA who is sympathetic and can charge you a lower fee. At the hospital, no one is sympathetic. (FGD, Women)

[TBAs use] sweet words, continuing education, putting some on track so that they practice good health.

(Female elder)

[TBAs] always think positively so they assist because they don't want the woman to die or the baby. They are skilled and if a problem happens, it's just an accident and they feel so bad. (Female elder)

The TBAs do a good job, they have interest in their job and the community members are happy with them and encourage them. They are available at anytime. (Husband)

The TBAs are free with them and are actually their friends. (FGD, Community leaders)

TBAs also give the mothers proper attention during the whole process of labour and delivery. (FGD, Community elders)

One TBA described her approach to caring for women during delivery:

"I'll make her feel comfortable by encouraging her to have no fear. Encourage her not to cry. [...] I'll encourage her to feel free and faithful...When she is about to deliver, I'll comfort her and advise her with loving/soothing words and make her lie properly... I'll soothe her so that she may not have a tear.

A few community members described instances in which facility-based providers (more commonly male attendants) offered care similar to that given by TBAs. Aspects of care that were particularly valued included being treated gently, being talked to "nicely" and being bathed after delivery:

Some handle you very gently. She ushers you to the bathroom and gives you hot, salty water to sit on to ensure you heal fast. (FGD, Women)

I got good care. The nurse took my responsibility and even washed me. (Woman with obstetric complications)

One of the nurses was good to me. She talked to me nicely, like how you sweet talk a patient. (Woman with obstetric complications)

You know that a skilled attendant is like your God once you've stepped into the hospital. The way he welcomes and talks to you will even ease the pain you are feeling. (Woman of reproductive age)

"The one who delivered me was a student nurse. He followed all the instructions and he was very committed. After delivery I was tired, he brought water and poured on my back and bathed me from the back. (Woman of reproductive age)

Community members also offered suggestions for how facility-based providers' skills should be improved:

Skilled care providers should be re-trained on communication skills and how to handle patients...so skilled care provider should be restrained and use good language towards the expectant mother and not hurl insults. Such treatment makes mothers fearful of seeking care at health facilities...TBAs also give the mothers proper attention during the whole process of labour and delivery. (FGD, Community elders)