

# Respectful Maternity Care: The Right of Every Woman

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## ABSTRACT

Women have a right to demand respectful maternity care (RMC). However, it is common in many circumstances for maternity care to be disrespectful. Women's care should be based on ethical principles and respect for human rights, and the approaches that acknowledge women's preferences and needs should be encouraged. It refers to the care provided to all women which upholds their dignity, privacy, and confidentiality; assures their freedom from abuse and mistreatment; and provides them with the information they need to make an educated decision; and receive ongoing support during labor and delivery [World Health Organization (WHO)].

**Keywords:** Respectful maternity care, Rights, Quality care.

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## INTRODUCTION

The provision of care that is safe, courteous, and allows women to maintain their dignity and sense of control is the fundamental element of high-quality maternity and newborn care.<sup>1</sup> Safe motherhood which focuses on the promotion of health and prevention of morbidity and mortality, must be expanded to respect for women's basic human rights.<sup>2</sup> Women have a right to demand RMC. However, it is common in many circumstances for maternity care to be disrespectful.<sup>3</sup>

World Health Organization stated that "every woman has the right to the greatest possible quality of health, including the right to dignified, respectful care during pregnancy and childbirth," for the avoidance and eradication of disrespect and abuse during childbirth.<sup>3,4</sup> Women's care should be based on ethical principles, respect for human rights, and approaches that acknowledge women's preferences and needs should be encouraged.<sup>5</sup>

## DEFINITION

It refers to care provided to all women that upholds their dignity, privacy, and confidentiality, assures their freedom from abuse and mistreatment, and provides them with the information they need to make an educated decision and receive ongoing support during labor and delivery (WHO).<sup>5,6</sup>

## THE NEED FOR RMC

Maternal and neonatal death rates have decreased over the past few decades, and there has been notable improvement made in maternal and neonatal health care worldwide.<sup>7</sup> The standard of services offered has increased as a result of strengthened legislative frameworks, efficient clinical procedures, and programmatic best practices. Despite these advancements, not everyone has access to high-quality services, particularly in underdeveloped nations during pregnancy and childbirth.<sup>5,8,9</sup>

## COMPONENTS OF RMC

The White Ribbon Alliance released the components of RMC including "respect for women's autonomy, dignity, empathy, privacy, confidentiality, feelings, choices, and preferences, including companionship during maternity care and continuous

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care during labor and childbirth and also prevention of harm and ill-treatment."<sup>10</sup>

## MISTREATMENT IN MATERNITY CARE AREAS

In reality, disrespect and abuse can take many different forms, from overt instances of physical violence to more subtle (and possibly unintended) behaviors.<sup>11</sup> For instance, more overt behaviors can involve slapping a woman during labor by a medical professional or forcibly detaining her in the hospital due to unpaid bills. Being punished, suffering interventions without the availability of information, consent, or shared decision-making, and being denied privacy are examples of more subtle behaviors.<sup>11</sup>

Inadequate privacy, committing damaging acts, lack of knowledge regarding the care offered, insufficiently informed consent, denying the ability to choose a birth position, verbal abuse (insults, threats, extortion, and intimidation), No preference for a partner, abandoning the care of (leaving the woman alone or unattended), insufficient confidentiality denying food and drink during giving birth, preventing freedom of movement while working, discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, color, or economic circumstance, separation of the mother and child after delivery that is not essential, physical mistreatment (hitting/slapping), The woman is being held in the facility because the facility costs have not been paid.<sup>6,12,13</sup>

## ASPECTS OF RMC

Twelve aspects of RMC include preserving women's dignity, avoiding injury and abuse, maintaining privacy and secrecy, and

providing potential information and obtaining informed consent. Assuring ongoing access to family and community assistance and enhancing the standard of the surrounding environment and resources. Providing fair maternity care, engaging in good communication, respecting women's decisions that increase their ability to give birth, and having access to qualified and motivated human resources are all important. Continuity of care; efficient and effective care delivery.<sup>14,15</sup>

Strategic areas to aid in developing a methodical, evidence-based strategy for delivering high-quality care are as follows:

- Clinical recommendations
- Care standards
- Successful interventions
- Quality indicators
- Useful research and capacity development<sup>16</sup>

## INTERVENTIONS FOR PROMOTING RMC

Training staff in interpersonal communication skills, transforming values and attitudes, establishing quality improvement teams, monitoring disrespect and abuse, staff mentoring, improving privacy in the wards (by placing curtains or partitions between the beds), improving staff conditions (by offering tea to those working shifts), maternity open days, community workshops, and mediation/alternative dispute resolution.<sup>16,17</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Health institutions must provide women with privacy through the use of curtains or partitions and the freedom to select their own support person.
- Every pregnant woman deserves consistent access to expert routine and emergency care in a safe, courteous, and economical manner.
- Pregnancy care for all women should be free from all forms of discrimination, including physical, verbal, and sexual abuse.
- Women have the right to information and communication on the care of themselves and their children. Women's capacity to give birth is increased when they are included in the decision-making process and their choices are respected.
- Maternity health workers need to be valued and appreciated, as well as given the support, guidance, and training they require, as well as working conditions that allow them to deliver inclusive and respectful care.<sup>18</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The abuse of pregnant women is not an isolated episode, but rather a symptom of larger problems with the health care system. A potent weapon against mistreatment is educating women about this right and empowering them to speak up for themselves.<sup>19,20</sup>

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