

prevention and promotion of respectful
maternal and newborn health

WHO statement

Every woman has the right to the highest attainable standard of health, which includes the right to dignified, respectful health care.

Background

Ensuring universal access to safe, acceptable, good quality sexual and reproductive health care, particularly contraceptive access and maternal health care, can dramatically reduce global rates of maternal morbidity and mortality. Over recent decades, facility delivery rates have improved as women are increasingly incentivized to utilize facilities for childbirth, through demand generation, community mobilization, education, financial incentives or policy measures.

However, a growing body of research on women's experiences during pregnancy, and particularly childbirth, paints a disturbing picture. Many women across the globe experience disrespectful, abusive or neglectful treatment during childbirth in facilities. (1-3) This constitutes a

3. Emphasizing the rights of women to dignified, respectful health care throughout pregnancy and childbirth

International human rights frameworks highlight disrespect and abuse during childbirth as an important human rights issue, (6-8,15) and can aid women's health advocates in raising awareness and developing policy initiatives on the importance of respectful maternal care. Rights-based approaches to organizing and managing health systems can facilitate the provision of respectful, quality care at birth.

4. Generating data related to respectful and disrespectful care practices, systems of accountability and meaningful professional support are required

Health systems must be accountable for the treatment of women during childbirth, ensuring clear policies on rights and ethical standards are developed and implemented. Health-care providers at all levels require support and training to ensure

that childbearing women are treated with compassion and dignity. Those health services that already provide respectful maternity care, promote participation of women and communities and have implemented processes to track and continuously improve respectful care need to be identified, studied and documented.

5. Involve all stakeholders, including women, in efforts to improve quality of care and eliminate disrespectful and abusive practices

Ending disrespect and abuse during childbirth can only be achieved through an inclusive process, involving the participation of women, communities, health-care providers, managers, health professional training, education and certification bodies, professional associations, governments, health systems stakeholders, researchers, civil society groups and international organizations. We call upon these entities to join in efforts to ensure that disrespect and abuse is consistently identified and reported, and that locally appropriate preventative and therapeutic measures are implemented.

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