

Identifying research priorities in Midwifery, a multinational Delphi survey.

Midwifery education and research varies substantially between countries (1).

Midwifery research should aim to advance the knowledge and evidence within the field (2) whilst optimising the quality of maternal and newborn care (3).

To our knowledge, midwifery research has always been closely linked to nursing research. For such reason, we aimed to identify which methodologies, themes or clinical areas within midwifery were currently explored as well as those which should receive increased attention from the midwifery research community. We conducted a Delphi study following a recent international nursing education meeting promoted by the University Colleges Leuven-Limburg in Belgium.

At first, three themes were explored: 1) current midwifery research themes, 2) key midwifery practice areas and 3) important topics for the citizens' health. Once responses were received, they were thematically analysed, grouped in broad subject areas and sent back to a panel of international midwifery experts. Eleven of them contributed to the first stage of the study, conducted in April 2015, with a further seven providing responses in the second stage during January 2016.

The responses described three key research fields. Firstly, answers argued for the need to study midwifery services, their clinical outcomes and effectiveness; also, the use of complementary medicine; finally, the increase involvement of patients in their own care. Regarding this theme, our respondents suggested that improved efforts should be made to include women and families' views, with particular attention to those from

underrepresented backgrounds such as migrants or lower socioeconomic strata. Hitherto our results agree with previous evidence (3) that highlights how research priorities in midwifery mainly related to delivery of care or organizational elements. However, our survey also identified novel research strands and interests such as the impact of social determinants of health and intimate partner violence as a public health issue.

Second, the experts identified social issues that should receive some attention from midwifery as a profession. For example, the perception of midwifery by its own practitioners as well as the society. The construction of a given profession demands the generation and embodiment of its unique and own corpus of knowledge (2). To facilitate such expansion of the evidence, participants endorsed the need to further implement research in midwifery and midwifery education, consistent with emerging ideas (1,4).

Finally, and in terms of research methodologies used within midwifery, most respondents stressed the need to increase the application of relevant qualitative methodologies. All experts agreed on the need for midwifery research to be implemented in a way that guarantees comparability across health systems.

Although some of the opinions had been previously discussed (5,6) further research with a wider scope would be merited, particularly an intensified evaluation of midwifery interventions that would ideally incorporate clinical and patient-reported outcome measures. Increased multinational collaboration of midwifery research

groups may facilitate a much needed implementation of research findings to improve the health of citizens whilst driving the recognition of midwifery as a discipline on its own.

Authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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