

Targeting mistreatment of women during childbirth

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In a new systematic review appearing this week in *PLOS Medicine*, Meghan Bohren and colleagues of the WHO Department of Reproductive Health and Research, including HRP, and Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health synthesize qualitative and quantitative evidence to form a clearer picture of the extent and types of mistreatment that occurs during childbirth in health facilities. Such initiatives are key to developing policies to reduce and ultimately eliminate this inhumane and degrading phenomenon.

One of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals is to bring about a 75% reduction in the maternal mortality ratio. In 2010, some 289,000 maternal deaths occurred worldwide, many in low and middle income countries. While these numbers explain why attention is focused on a reduction in maternal deaths, attention is also needed to defining and measuring the extent of problems around childbirth, such as mistreatment, to better inform constructive changes in policies and practices.

The authors assess 65 published studies undertaken in 34 countries and they identify 7 areas of mistreatment and abuse: physical (such as slapping); sexual; verbal; stigma and discrimination; a failure to meet professional standards of care; poor rapport between women and providers and health system constraints (such as a lack of resources to provide women with privacy). This study is the first to provide a comprehensive and evidence-based typology of the mistreatment of women during childbirth. It can be used to develop tools, policies and

programs to prevent the mistreatment of women at an obviously vulnerable time. The authors also call for the adoption of the evidence based typology as a means of documenting and measuring mistreatment. Promoting positive birth experiences for [women](#) and their families, and providing clinics with adequate resources and trained staff are essential factors to improve the quality of care for mothers and newborns and is critical to further reduce the burden of morbidity and mortality and to reach the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

More information: Bohren MA, Vogel JP, Hunter EC, Lutsiv O, Makh SK, Souza JP, et al. (2015) The Mistreatment of Women during Childbirth in Health Facilities Globally: A Mixed-Methods Systematic Review. *PLoS Med* 12(6): e1001847. [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pmed.1001847](#)

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