

Category: Research

Country: Malawi

Title: POWER DYNAMICS BETWEEN CADRES IN MATERNITY SETTINGS IN MALAWI

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Introduction: Interprofessional teamwork is essential to positive patient, staff, organizational culture and contributes directly to positive maternal outcomes. Midwifery care providers in Malawi manage complicated interpersonal relationships in a difficult environment brought on by an already overworked workforce in maternity settings which reduces job satisfaction. The study was conducted to generate insights around interactions amongst midwifery care providers in Malawi.

Methods:

A qualitative study was conducted through 38 in-depth interviews, two focus group discussions, 16 observations and co-design workshops in two maternity wards as part of the *Action Leveraging Evidence to Reduce Perinatal Mortality and Morbidity in Sub-Saharan Africa* study which aims to improve intrapartum care. Women, companions, and midwifery care providers were purposively sampled. Interviews were conducted in the local language and transcribed into English. A reflexive thematic analysis was conducted.

Results: Hierarchical power dynamics were reported by all cadres to hamper quality of maternity care. Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (OBGYNs) and Medical Officers (MO) were perceived to act superior to midwives. Midwives experienced that they were ordered to carry out patient care that the one giving orders could do. OBGYN and MOs' preferences and personal relationships were directly influencing decisions to refer women in labour to midwives. Task shifting processes were experienced as challenging. When midwives were reluctant to continue monitoring women in prolonged labour, they referred them to OBGYNs and MOs. Lack of motivation to provide care during extended hours and limited support to midwives have increased the acceptability of reliance on interns and nursing students. Limited support to maternity care providers results in work-related frustration that are transferred to patient care.

Conclusion: Power dynamics and poor inter-professional working relationships affect maternity care. Effective leadership and management is needed to improve work environments and behaviour change amongst providers. Co-designing research and interventions may assist in addressing power dynamics.