

Perception and Experience of Pregnant Women Toward Midwife-Led Perinatal Care in Abua-Odual Health Facilities, Rivers State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *Globally, the obstetrician-led and the midwife care are the two skilled science-based maternity care models available for pregnant women. Midwife-led care is maternal and children healthcare approach in which the midwife takes the lead role in planning, organizing, and providing perinatal care to pregnant women. This study examined pregnant women's perception and experience toward midwife-led perinatal care in health facilities in Abua-Odual, Rivers State, Nigeria. This study adopted the interpretive phenomenology design. The study was conducted at Five (5) health facilities in Abua-Odual. A convenience sample of 30 percent women completed the study. In-depth interview were done using a non-structured interview guide. Collected data were analyzed using the Hsieh and Shannon's 5-step systematic content analysis technique. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the University of Port Harcourt Institutional Review Board. The six themes that emerged under perception were: affordability of midwifery services, personalized midwife-client relationship, empowerment of women to make decision, improved continuum of care, improved women-centered care, and improved satisfaction of care. The respondents reported positive experiences and showed a willingness to receive midwifery-led perinatal care. The study revealed that women were satisfied with the financial cost of midwifery services, appreciated the midwives expertise in providing maternity care, acknowledge the personalized relationship with the midwife, and shared that they were empowered to make decision about their health and wellbeing. This study recommends more research in this subject matter to enhance the delivery of women-friendly maternity care.*

KEY WORDS: Experiences, Midwife-led care, Perception, Phenomenology, Pregnancy.

INTRODUCTION

Maternal and child health is a fundamental component of public health that makes the well-being of pregnant mothers and their fetuses and newborns a priority (Birhanu & Mathibe-Neke,

2022). Antenatal, intrapartum, and postnatal care are critical aspects of the care continuum for pregnant women that ensures safe pregnancies, births, and puerperium (Mauluka et al., 2023). Globally, there is a growing recognition of the benefits of perinatal care by midwives care in health facilities for its potential to improve maternal and neonatal outcomes (Wassén et al., 2023). Midwives play a pivotal role in providing holistic, woman-centred care throughout the pregnancy and childbirth journey (Hailemeskel et al., 2021). Understanding the perspectives of pregnant women on midwife-led care is crucial for informing policy and healthcare system improvement that can enhance health outcomes (Mose et al., 2023).

Pregnancy is an experience that profoundly impacts the pregnant mother and their families. It is a life defining journey that brings about physical, emotional, and social changes (McNestry et al., 2023). Physically, pregnancy marks the beginning of a woman's role as a parent. Her body undergoes miraculous transformations to support the growth of a new life. From the moment of conception, the body adapts to accommodate the developing foetus, a process marked by morning sickness, weight gain, and bodily discomforts. As the foetus grows, the woman experiences a unique bond as she feels the foetal movements within her. The bond fosters a sense of responsibility and maternal instinct, preparing her for the impending birth (Galbally et al., 2023). Emotionally, pregnancy is a rollercoaster of feelings. Pregnant mothers experience a spectrum of emotions, from the initial joy of the positive pregnancy test to the anxieties (Tang et al., 2019). Hormonal changes can lead to mood swings and heightened sensitivity, emphasizing the need for emotional support from care providers (Rehbein et al., 2022). The anticipation of becoming a parent and the dreams associated with it become integral parts of a pregnant mother's emotional landscape. Socially, pregnancy extends its influence to the entire family. Partners, siblings, and extended family members all play roles in supporting the pregnant woman. The anticipation of a new family member can foster a sense of unity and shared responsibility. Conversely, it can also reveal existing challenges and prompt families to adapt (Qin et al., 2023).

Perinatal (antenatal, intrapartum, and postnatal) care is essential to pregnant women. Antenatal care is essential because it allows healthcare providers to monitor the health of the pregnant woman and her developing foetus (Tekelab et al., 2019). Regular check-ups during pregnancy help identify and address any potential complications or risk factors, allowing for timely interventions. It also provides an opportunity to educate pregnant mothers about proper nutrition, prenatal vitamins, and healthy lifestyle choices. Intrapartum care, which includes care during labour and childbirth, is equally vital. Health facilities have skilled healthcare professionals who can monitor the progress of labour, administer pain relief when necessary, and provide immediate medical attention in case of emergencies (Ahmed et al., 2023). This reduces the risk of complications during childbirth. Postnatal care ensures a safer recovery environment for both mother and neonate. Skilled healthcare providers such as midwives and obstetricians working in primary and secondary health facilities provide perinatal care (Niessink-Beckers et al., 2023).

Midwives are highly trained health professionals who provide a range of care services such as, routine examinations and managing uncomplicated pregnancies and childbirths (Dzomeku et al., 2023). They are essential in making sure that pregnant mothers get the right care and support that is tailored to ensuring optimal maternal and neonatal health outcomes. Midwives who work in primary health facilities are the first healthcare providers that pregnant women consult for perinatal care (Chakraborty et al., 2023). Primary health facilities offer antenatal, intrapartum, postnatal, continuous health education, and emotional support to pregnant mothers (Negero et al., 2023).

Globally, the obstetrician-led and the midwife-led care are the two skilled science-based maternity care models available for pregnant women. An obstetrician is usually the lead perinatal care provider (Niessink-Beckers et al., 2023). Nonetheless, the obstetrician and midwife share responsibilities in some situations while the midwife would be in charge of perinatal care in certain situations (Katarzyna et al., 2023). In countries that offer primary-secondary-tertiary levels of care, midwives are the principal caregivers for low-risk pregnancies at the primary level (Mose et al., 2023). If complications arise, the pregnant women are referred to obstetrician-led secondary and tertiary care (Niessink-Beckers et al., 2023).

Midwife-led care is a maternal and child healthcare approach in which the midwife takes the lead role in planning, organizing, and providing perinatal care to pregnant women (Edmonds et al., 2020). Perinatal care begins from booking to the end of the six-week postnatal period (Negero et al., 2023). The midwife-led model of care has gained recognition for its capacity to advocate for natural childbirth and reduce medical interventions during pregnancy (Niessink-Beckers et al., 2023). Research findings have consistently shown that midwife-led care offers numerous advantages for both mothers and newborns (Edmonds et al., 2020; Michel & Fontenot, 2023). These benefits include shorter labour durations, reduced likelihood of requiring intrapartum pain relief, and a decreased likelihood of expressing dissatisfaction with the childbirth experience (Chakraborty et al., 2023). Additionally, midwife-led care facilitates the birthing process, enhances mothers' experience, minimizes the need for medical interventions, and fosters strong bonds between pregnant women and their midwives (Fikre et al., 2023). Despite the recognized advantages of this approach, its implementation varies across healthcare settings, and its acceptance varies among pregnant women (Mose et al., 2023). To enhance the quality of maternal healthcare services, it is essential to have insights into the perceptions and experiences of pregnant women concerning midwife-led perinatal care in primary health facilities.

The World Health Organization (WHO) released guidelines related to care in childbirth and advised limiting the use of oxytocics and vaginal examinations during labour (Betran et al., 2021; Tex-Jack & Eleke, 2021). In spite of support for the recommendations from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG), the constant monitoring of women with low-risk pregnancies is still common in Africa (Azhar & Walker, 2023; Nabhan & Boulvain, 2020). This shows that the opinions of credible professional organizations have not been successful in narrowing the gap between obstetric practices and existing evidence, especially in

African. In Nigeria where access to quality healthcare is limited, the midwife-led care model is an option offered to pregnant women in a bid to limit medical interventions and promote natural childbirth. Since midwife-led perinatal care could replace obstetric-led perinatal care for low risk pregnancies, it is essential to understand pregnant women's perceptions and experiences concerning midwife-led perinatal care.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to examine pregnant women's perception and experience toward midwife-led perinatal care in health facilities in Abua-Odual, Rivers State, Nigeria.

The specific objectives were to:

1. Explore the perceptions of pregnant women about midwife-led perinatal care in Abua-Odual Health Facilities.
2. Explore the experiences of pregnant women about midwife-led perinatal care in Abua-Odual Health Facilities.

METHODOLOGY

This employed the interpretive phenomenology design. The population of the study were pregnant women who are seeking care in the public Healthcare facilities in Abua-Odual, Rivers State, Nigeria. A total of 44 pregnant women were registered in the healthcare centres (Otapha = 8, Okpeden = 7, Ogbo-Abuan = 9, Emughan = 11, and Emesu = 9). The study utilized a sample size of 30 pregnant women, with six women selected from each of the five healthcare centres using a convenience sampling technique. The instruments for data collection include a voice recorder, notepad, pen, interview guide, and the researcher. The interview guide for the research study is non-structured to ensure a comprehensive exploration of various aspects related to pregnant women's experiences of midwife-led perinatal care. It has six sections. It starts with an introductory section that introduces the researcher, sets the context for the study, and emphasizes the confidentiality and voluntary nature of participation. Section two focused on gathering participant demographics, including age, educational background, marital status, and occupation. It also delved into the number of pregnancies and their outcomes, offering insights into the participants' reproductive history. Section three explores participants' perceptions of midwife-led perinatal care. It uncovered their understanding of this type of care and the factors that influenced their decision to seek it. Additionally, it encouraged participants to share any challenges or concerns they may have encountered during their perinatal care journey. Section four delved into the actual experiences of pregnant women with midwife-led perinatal care. It assessed the quality of interactions and communication with midwives during prenatal visits and inquires about participants' experiences during labour, delivery, and postnatal care provided by midwives. Section five was on maternal healthcare decision-making is another critical aspect explored in the interview guide. It aims to uncover the factors that played a role in participants' choice of healthcare facilities for perinatal care. Furthermore, it investigated the impact of

cultural or traditional beliefs on healthcare decisions and addresses any barriers or challenges that may have hindered access to midwife-led care. Section six of the interview guide concluded by inviting participants to provide suggestions for improvement. This section encourages them to share their recommendations on enhancing the quality of midwife-led perinatal care, as well as specific services or support that could be improved within healthcare facilities.

The Infinix Smart 5 X657C android digital voice recorder is an electronic device that was used to record voice in a digital format. The recorder is compact and portable, making it easy to carry around in a bag or pocket. It has a built-in 32GB memory capacity, which can store up to 8,320 hours of audio files, and a USB port that allows for easy transfer of recorded files to a laptop computer device. The recorder also has a built-in stereo microphone that can capture clear, high-quality sound. It can record in multiple file formats, including MP3 and WMA, and has a noise-cancellation feature that reduces background noise for improved audio clarity. It features a large, high-contrast touch-screen that displays the recording time, remaining memory, and battery life. The recorder runs on rechargeable batteries, which can last for up to 110 hours of recording time. It also has a playback function with adjustable playback speed and a calendar search function that allows users to quickly find recordings based on the date and time researchers were made. The analysis of the gathered data was conducted through a rigorous evidence-based methodology. This comprehensive process encompass several key steps, including transcription, organization, coding, and categorization of non-numerical data. These steps were vital in capturing overarching themes, subthemes, and patterns that hold the potential to address the research inquiries effectively.

The qualitative data underwent a systematic content analysis, guided by the established five-step approach developed by Hsieh and Shannon (2005). The steps involved:

1. *Organizing and Transcribing*: The initial stage involved the meticulous organization and transcription of audio recordings and notes, ensuring the accuracy and completeness of the data.
2. *Reviewing and Exploring*: Subsequently, the transcripts was subjected to a thorough review and exploration to verify their precision and comprehensiveness.
3. *Coding Rules Establishment*: A set of clear and consistent coding rules was established to systematically categorize the data. This step is pivotal in structuring the analysis process.
4. *Code Combination for Themes*: Codes were methodically combined to form overarching themes and subthemes. This process aims to uncover meaningful patterns and relationships within the data.
5. *Presentation of Themes*: Finally, the emergent themes were presented in a cohesive and organized manner. This approach facilitated effective communication of the research findings, offering a clear and insightful understanding of the data's underlying patterns and significance.

RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings of this study.

The analysis of in-depth interviews yielded several findings, including two overarching domains of Perception and experience, and several themes and subthemes.

Demographic characteristics of the participants

Table 4.1: Demographic characteristics of the participants (n = 30)

Participant	Age	Education	Marital status	Occupation	Gravidity
PW 1	34	Secondary	Married	Civil servant	3
PW 2	41	Primary	Married	Trader	4
PW 3	30	Secondary	Married	Trader	2
PW 4	37	Tertiary	Married	Civil servant	3
PW 5	44	Primary	Married	Home maker	2
PW 6	36	Secondary	Married	Home maker	3
PW 7	29	Tertiary	Married	Home maker	2
PW 8	32	Primary	Married	Civil servant	3
PW 9	35	Tertiary	Married	Civil servant	3
PW 10	24	Tertiary	Married	Home maker	2
PW 11	34	Tertiary	Married	Civil servant	1
PW 12	37	Primary	Married	Civil servant	2
PW 13	39	Tertiary	Married	Trader	3
PW 14	25	Tertiary	Married	Home maker	3
PW 15	24	Primary	Married	Civil servant	2
PW 16	44	Secondary	Married	Civil servant	2
PW 17	22	Primary	Married	Home maker	4
PW 18	32	Secondary	Married	Home maker	2
PW 19	33	Secondary	Married	Home maker	2
PW 20	43	Tertiary	Married	Civil servant	2
PW 21	41	Primary	Married	Trader	3
PW 22	25	Primary	Married	Home maker	1
PW 23	32	Tertiary	Married	Civil servant	2
PW 24	37	Secondary	Married	Trader	3
PW 25	44	Secondary	Married	Civil servant	4
PW 26	28	Primary	Married	Civil servant	2
PW 27	29	Secondary	Married	Civil servant	2
PW 28	26	Secondary	Married	Home maker	2
PW 29	43	Primary	Married	Civil servant	4
PW 30	31	Primary	Married	Civil servant	3

Table 4.1 provides demographic information about the participants involved in the study, including their age, educational level, marital status, and occupation. The table lists each participant (denoted as PW followed by a numerical identifier), along with their respective demographic characteristics. The participants were aged between 22 and 44. They had Primary,

Secondary, and Tertiary education. The participants were all married and their occupations were Civil servant, Trader, and Home-maker (also called "House-wife" in Nigerian colloquial expression).

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of pregnant women about midwife-led perinatal care in Abua-Odual Health Facilities?

Under perception 2 themes and 6 subthemes were identified. They are described in details below

Theme 1A: Midwife as the main provider of Perinatal Care

The participants were asked to describe their understanding of midwife-led perinatal care. Their responses provided valuable insights into how they perceive this model of care and the elements that they consider integral to their maternity experience.

Subtheme 1A.1: Midwife leads perinatal care

One participant expressed her understanding of midwife-led perinatal care as follows:

"To me, midwife-led perinatal care means having a midwife as the main caregiver throughout my pregnancy, labour, and after childbirth." (PW 17)

Another participant expressed that:

"...It's about having a skilled midwife who listens to my concerns, provides personalized support, and empowers me to make decisions about my care." (PW 20)

Subtheme 1A.2: Midwife-led care entails continuity

One participant emphasized that continuity of care is central to midwife-led perinatal care:

"For me, midwife-led care means having the same midwife with me throughout my pregnancy. It's about building a relationship based on trust and familiarity, knowing that I have someone who knows my history and preferences." (PW 8)

Subtheme 1A.3: Midwife-led perinatal care is holistic

Few participants highlighted the holistic approach of midwife-led perinatal care, which considers not only the physical aspects of pregnancy but also the emotional and psychological needs of women. One participant stated that:

"Midwife-led care is about more than just medical interventions. It's about providing emotional support, empowering women to trust their bodies, and promoting a positive birth experience." (PW 14)

Subtheme 1A.4: Midwife-led perinatal care is supportive

In describing their understanding of midwife-led perinatal care, the participants also emphasized the crucial role of midwives in providing support, guidance, and advocacy throughout the childbirth journey.

"... I believe it's my midwife's role to empower me, support me in making informed choices, and advocate for my needs and preferences," (PW 2)

Another participant added:

"Midwives are more than just healthcare providers. They are companions and sources of strength for women during pregnancy and birth." (PW 30)

Theme 2A: Accessibility and Convenience of Care

When the participants were asked "What influenced your decision to seek midwife-led perinatal care?" The participants emphasized convenience of care and accessibility as the significant factors influencing their decision to seek midwife-led perinatal care in the health centre.

Subtheme 2A.1: Flexible Appointment Scheduling

The participants valued midwife-led services because they were easily accessible, timely, and convenient, reducing barriers to accessing essential maternity care. A participant responded that:

"I appreciate that midwives offers flexible appointment times to accommodate our schedule. It makes it easier for us to attend regular check-ups." (PW 7)

Subtheme 2A.2: Proximity to Healthcare Facilities

The participants mentioned that residing close to the midwife-led health centre contributes to their preference for midwife-led perinatal care. One participant shared that:

"Living close to the healthcare facility makes it convenient for me to access care when needed. It's reassuring to know that help is nearby in case of emergencies." (PW 22)

Research Question 2: What are the experiences of pregnant women about midwife-led perinatal care in Abua-Odual Health Facilities?

Under experience 10 themes and 21 subthemes were identified. They are described in details below

When the participants were asked to describe their interactions and communication with the midwives during your prenatal visits, they provided relevant responses.

Theme 1B: Clear Communication and Information Sharing:

Effective communication and information sharing emerged as vital aspects of pregnant women's experience with midwife-led perinatal care.

Subtheme 1B.1: Clear and Transparent Communication:

The participants appreciated midwives who communicated clearly, listened attentively, and provided comprehensive information about their care. A participant shared that:

"I appreciate when my midwife explains things clearly and answers all my questions. It helps me understand what's happening and feel more prepared for childbirth." (PW 16)

Subtheme 1B.2: Timely and Accessible Information:

The participants revealed that midwife-led perinatal care provides timely information. One participant voiced that:

"At all times...my midwife is always available to answer my calls and messages. Doctors don't even give out their phone numbers...talk less of pick calls...It's reassuring to know that I can reach out to the midwife for information or support whenever I need it." (PW 23)

Theme 2B: Respect for Cultural and Personal Preferences

The pregnant women valued midwife-led care on respect for their cultural beliefs, values, and personal preferences throughout the pregnancy journey.

Subtheme 2B.1: Cultural Sensitivity:

The participants reported that respectful and culturally sensitive care contributed to a positive experience and enhanced trust in midwife-led perinatal care. A participant reported:

"...I'm grateful that my midwife respects my cultural practices and incorporates them into my care. It makes me feel valued and understood as a person." (PW 4)

The participants further noted that in situations where the midwife does not understand their culture, she takes time to listen to understand the culture. A participant mentioned that:

"Where my midwife is not sure of the cultural practice...my midwife takes the time to understand my preferences and tailor my care accordingly. It's comforting to know that my needs are being considered in line with my culture." (PW 17)

Theme 3B: Emotional Support and Encouragement

Pregnant women appreciated the emotional support and encouragement provided by midwife-led perinatal care, especially during challenging moments in their pregnancy journey.

Subtheme 3B.1: Empathetic Listening

The pregnant women reported that midwife-led care offers empathy, reassurance, and encouragement which are instrumental in alleviating anxiety and promoting emotional well-being. One participant mentioned that:

"My midwife listens to my worries without judgment and offers empathy and support. It's comforting to have someone who understands what I'm going through." (PW 9)

Subtheme 3B.2: Positive Reinforcement

The participants noted that midwife's support in their previous births were positive. One participant noted that:

"in my last birth...during labour, my midwife's words of encouragement helped me stay focused and motivated. Her support gave me the strength to keep going..." (PW 28)

Theme 4B: Improve health awareness and behaviour

When the participants were asked to share their experiences with midwife-led care, their responses were insightful.

Subtheme 4B.1: Increased awareness of pregnancy changes

The participants expressed that receiving care from midwives fostered a supportive environment where they felt comfortable asking questions and gaining deeper insights into the changes occurring during pregnancy.

"For me, having a midwife means we can establish a friendly relationship and feel confident in seeking more information about the reasons behind certain care needs, the alterations during pregnancy, the health of my foetus, and what future care would entail." (PW 14)

Subtheme 4B.2: Enhanced maternal healthcare-seeking behaviour

Participants noted that guidance from trusted midwives positively influenced their healthcare-seeking behaviour and reduced delays in seeking necessary care. One participant reported that:

"...The midwife advised me to come to the hospital if I experienced ruptured amniotic fluid, decreased foetal movement, or headaches. I developed a headache, and following her advice, I came in for a check-up...." (PW 1)

Theme 5B: Improved Midwife-client relationship

The relationship between a midwife and a woman greatly impacts the childbirth experience.

Subtheme 5B.3: Cultivation of trusting relationships between women and midwives

Participants emphasized that midwife-led perinatal care facilitate a sense of empowerment, encouraging women to engage in decision-making processes. One participant reported that:

"Receiving care from a midwife feels comfortable. We can easily connect, build trust and friendship, which alleviates the fear and allows us to participate in decision-making. It is not just the same with when a doctor is attended to me" (PW 5)

Furthermore, such care fosters trust between the midwife and the woman, bolstering the woman's confidence in her ability to give birth and reducing anxiety. Participants expressed a preference for consistent care from trusted midwives over encounters with unfamiliar doctors. Another participant reported that:

"...Having a known midwife provides consistency of care, allowing for increased autonomy in decisions with us the pregnant person regarding antenatal, childbirth, and postnatal care. Also, the midwife works with a focus on facilitating labour and birth with minimal medical intervention. It is comforting..." (PW 22)

Subtheme 5B.4: Promotion of respectful maternity care

Participants reported receiving respectful care from midwives, contrasting it with negative experiences they had heard about from other women. One participant appreciated the warm reception and health education provided by midwives.

"...The midwife receives me warmly and educates me on preparing for childbirth and understanding potential pregnancy complications. In fact, I have chosen to give birth in this same facility and even share my positive experiences with other women who may have had reservations about midwives." (PW 12)

Theme 6B: Enhanced continuum of care

Continuum of care in midwifery is integrated healthcare services that ensure seamless and coordinated delivery across different trimesters or stages of pregnancy, birth, and postnatal period.

Subtheme 6B.1: Improvement in antenatal care visits

Midwifery-led perinatal care involves support provided to expectant mothers throughout the stages of pregnancy, labour, and postpartum by a team of midwives. The participants expressed that receiving antenatal services from midwives ensures a consistent flow of care. One participant expressed the following:

"... a midwife advised me on the benefits of hospital birth over home birth ... emphasized the importance of attending appointments...the midwife also treated me with respect ..."
(PW 28)

Another participant expressed satisfaction with the care provided by multiple midwives during her antenatal visits.

"...i appreciate the thoroughness of care, different midwives attended to various aspects of my healthcare, which made me feel assured and confident that there won't be mistakes."
(PW 7)

A few participants in the study expressed a preference for receiving care from a variety of midwives. They cited differences in the levels of knowledge, skill, and empathy among midwives as the rationale behind this preference. One of the participants mentioned that:

"For me, I feel it's better to get care from different midwives. Each midwife brings their own unique blend of knowledge, skills, and empathy to the table. While some may excel in certain areas, others might lack proficiency or have different interpersonal approaches. Having access to different midwives ensures that I receive well-rounded and high-quality care tailored to my individual needs." (PW 16)

Theme 7B: Personalized care

In the realm of maternity care, the relationship between midwives and their clients holds profound significance. Personalized care goes beyond mere medical interactions; it encompasses trust, empathy, and shared decision-making.

Subtheme 7B.1: Tailoring Care to Individual Needs:

Personalized midwifery care acknowledges the uniqueness of each client and tailors care plans to their individual needs and preferences. The participants mentioned that midwives take time to listen to the pregnant women's concerns, values, and birth preferences, ensuring that care is personalized and woman-centred. One participant reported that:

"...My midwife takes the time to understand my preferences and concerns. She respects my choices and supports me in making informed decisions about my care." (PW 4)

This individualized approach promotes a sense of agency and empowerment, empowering women to actively participate in their childbirth experience.

Subtheme 7B.2: Providing personalized Care:

Uninterrupted support from the same midwife throughout pregnancy, birth, and the postnatal period, is a hallmark of personalized midwifery care. This continuity fosters a deep connection between the midwife and client, allowing for personalized support and guidance at every stage of the childbirth journey. One participant shared that:

"Knowing that my midwife will be with me from pregnancy to postpartum gives me peace of mind. I feel supported and reassured, knowing that she understands my history and preferences." (PW 12)

This personalized care enhances communication, promotes trust, and contributes to positive birth outcomes.

Subtheme: 7B.3: Facilitating Emotional Support:

In addition to providing clinical care, personalized midwifery care offers emotional support and companionship to pregnant women. They serve as confidantes, lending a listening ear and offering empathy and encouragement during moments of vulnerability. One participant mentioned that:

"...in my previous birth, my midwife's presence during labour was comforting. She offered words of encouragement and reassurance, which helped me stay focused and confident." (PW 3)

The emotional support perhaps plays a crucial role in alleviating anxiety, reducing stress, and promoting a positive birth experience.

Theme 8A: Empowerment of women to make decisions

Empowering women in maternity care involves respecting their autonomy and right to self-determination throughout the childbirth process. It acknowledges that every woman is unique and has the capacity to make decisions that align with her values, preferences, and needs.

Subtheme 8A.1: Autonomy and Self-Determination:

By providing comprehensive information, facilitating open communication, and involving women in decision-making, midwives empower pregnant women to take an active role in shaping their childbirth experience. One participant shared that:

"Being involved in decisions about my care made me feel in control of my pregnancy and birth. It gave me confidence in my ability to advocate for myself and my baby." (PW 8)

Subtheme 8A.2: Informed Decision-Making:

Central to empowerment in maternity care is ensuring that pregnant women have access to accurate, evidence-based information to make informed decisions about their care. This includes

discussing various options, risks, and benefits, as well as respecting pregnant women's preferences and values. Empowered decision-making enables pregnant women to weigh their options, ask questions, and express their concerns, ultimately leading to choices that are aligned with their values and goals. One participant responded that:

"...having access to information allowed me to make decisions that felt right for me and my baby. My midwife supported me in exploring different options and helped me understand the implications of each choice." (PW 19)

Subtheme 8A.3: Enhancing Birth Experiences:

Empowering women to make decisions in maternity care contributes to positive birth experiences and outcomes. When women feel empowered and involved in decision-making, they are more likely to have a sense of ownership and satisfaction with their childbirth experience. This can lead to reduced stress, anxiety, and fear during labour and birth, as well as increased feelings of control and confidence. A participant shared that:

"During my last birth...being empowered to make decisions about my care made my birth experience more positive and empowering. I felt respected and supported throughout the process." (PW 17)

Theme 9B: Empowerment through Education and Preparation

Education and preparation for childbirth emerged as empowering aspects of women's experiences with midwife-led perinatal care.

Subtheme 9B.1: Childbirth Education Classes

Pregnant women valued midwives who provided comprehensive childbirth education, empowering them to make informed decisions and feel confident in their ability to navigate childbirth. A participant responded that:

"Attending childbirth education classes with my midwife helped me feel more prepared and confident about giving birth. I learned valuable information and techniques that eased my anxiety." (PW 10)

Subtheme 9B.2: Birth Planning and Preparation

Pregnant women found midwife-led perinatal care as a tool for providing a sense of control over their birth plan. A participant noted that:

"My midwife guided me through creating a birth plan that reflected my preferences and wishes for labour and delivery. Having a plan in place gave me a sense of control and empowerment." (PW 19)

When asked what influenced their choice of facility to access midwife-led services, their responses were insightful.

Theme 10B: Affordability of midwife-led perinatal care services

The participants expressed satisfaction with the price of midwifery services in the health centre and voiced deep concerns about the affordability of Hospital and Obstetrician's services.

Subtheme 10B.1: *Low financial cost of midwifery services*

The participants revealed that they hail from low-income backgrounds, hence have limited funds to spend on hospital-based obstetric doctor's care. One participant shared the following:

"...I decided to maintain my demand for antenatal services from the midwife in the health centre. This is because i worry about how I'll afford all the antenatal visits and delivery fees at the general hospital. The hospital cost of care is beyond my reach." (PW 30)

The financial burden associated with hospital services, including consultation fees, laboratory tests, and delivery expenses, can be overwhelming for families struggling to make ends meet. Another participant added that:

"Even transportation costs to reach the hospital can be a challenge, but the health centre is here with us in the community...no transportation costs...and we see the midwife as one of us." (PW 21)

Subtheme 10B.2: *Impact of low midwifery prices on healthcare-seeking Behaviour:*

The affordability of midwifery services profoundly influences healthcare-seeking behaviour among the participants. Furthermore, the fear of incurring high medical bills can deter women from seeking timely assistance, posing significant threats to maternal and neonatal health. One participant lamented:

"I often delay seeking care or skip laboratory tests because of hospital costs, but since i began patronizing midwifery care, i have never skipped any lab test or missed any clinic appointments." (PW 23)

Subtheme 10B.3: *Satisfaction during the pregnancy period*

The participants emphasized the value of midwife counselling in various aspects of prenatal care, such as advising on iron and folic acid supplementation, cautioning against unauthorized drug use in early pregnancy, and minimizing unnecessary medical interventions. This comprehensive guidance contributed significantly to their overall satisfaction with the care received.

"The antenatal care classes provided me with essential health education, empowering me to navigate my pregnancy journey confidently. The midwife's advice ranged from avoiding unnecessary medications to ensuring proper intake of iron and folic acid supplements, as well as discussing immunizations and potential danger signs during pregnancy. This total package approach, including financial preparation and birth planning, has left me completely satisfied with the care provided by the midwives." (PW 4)

Additionally, participants highlighted the effectiveness of midwife counselling in managing minor pregnancy-related discomforts. One participant reported that:

"During the three months of my pregnancy, I experienced nausea and vomiting. Following the midwife's recommendation to consume solid foods regularly and use large pillows at night significantly alleviated my symptoms." (PW 6)

DISCUSSION

The findings regarding pregnant women's perceptions of midwife-led perinatal care unveiled insightful perspectives highlighting the crucial role of midwives in maternity care. Two main themes emerged: the depiction of the midwife as the primary caregiver throughout the perinatal journey and the accessibility and convenience of care. Participants characterized midwife-led perinatal care as involving a competent midwife who takes on a central role in providing care and support from pregnancy through labour and postpartum. They stressed the significance of having a well-informed and supportive midwife who attentively listens to their concerns, delivers personalized care, and enables them to make informed decisions about their health. The reason for this finding could be that pregnant women may have developed a high level of trust in midwives based on previous positive experiences or recommendations from others. This trust could stem from the personalized care and support provided by midwives, which leads women to perceive them as the primary caregivers throughout the perinatal journey. Additionally, the continuity of care provided by midwives, where the same midwife accompanies women throughout their pregnancy, labor, and postpartum period, may have contributed to the perception of midwives as the main providers of perinatal care. This continuity allows for the development of a strong relationship between the midwife and the woman, fostering a sense of trust and confidence in the midwife's abilities to support them throughout the childbirth experience.

This finding aligns with Mose et al.'s (2023) study conducted in Ethiopia which explored pregnant women's perceptions of midwifery-led continuity care models. The study identified four main themes, with a focus on improved care, including improved continuum of care, enhanced woman-centred care, and increased satisfaction with care. The findings highlight the importance of receiving all antenatal, delivery, and postnatal care from the same midwives for consistent information and respectful care. Additionally, continuity of care is shown to improve women's awareness of pregnancy-related changes, influence maternal healthcare-seeking behaviour, and enable more involvement in decision-making. The study underscores the positive impact of midwifery-led continuity care models in improving care for pregnant women, emphasizing the significance of consistent care, enhanced awareness, improved healthcare-seeking behaviour, and trustful relationships. Nonetheless, while both studies emphasize the importance of midwifery-led care in improving outcomes for pregnant women, they differ in their contexts and methodologies. This study focused on perceptions of midwife-led perinatal care among pregnant women, while Mose et al. (2023) specifically examined the effectiveness of midwifery-led continuity care models in Ethiopia. Additionally, while this current study highlights the role of trust and continuity of care in shaping perceptions of midwife-led care, Mose et al.'s (2023) study delved into specific aspects of improved care and potential barriers to implementing continuity care models.

The concept of ongoing care surfaced as a significant aspect, with participants appreciating the notion of maintaining the same midwife during their pregnancy. They highlighted the significance of developing trust gradually and underscored the necessity of establishing familiarity. This continuity was deemed critical in ensuring that the midwife comprehends the woman's medical background, inclinations, and specific requirements. With a steady caregiver in

place, participants experienced a sense of support and comfort; feeling assured that they had a dependable presence throughout their maternity experience. The finding that participants valued the concept of ongoing care, particularly having the same midwife throughout their pregnancy, can be attributed to the importance of building trust and familiarity over time. Pregnancy is a deeply personal and vulnerable experience, and having a consistent caregiver who understands one's medical history, preferences, and individual needs can instil a sense of security and comfort. This continuity allows for the development of a strong therapeutic relationship between the pregnant woman and the midwife, fostering trust and mutual understanding. As a result, participants may feel more empowered to openly discuss their concerns, ask questions, and actively participate in decision-making regarding their care. Additionally, the emphasis on maintaining the same midwife throughout the pregnancy can be understood in the context of the holistic nature of midwifery-led perinatal care. Midwives not only provide medical support but also offer emotional and psychological guidance throughout the maternity journey. Having a familiar and trusted midwife allows participants to receive consistent emotional support and encouragement, which can be invaluable during the ups and downs of pregnancy. This emotional continuity contributes to a positive birthing experience by reducing anxiety and promoting a sense of empowerment and confidence in the woman's ability to navigate pregnancy and childbirth. Thus, participants prioritize ongoing care with the same midwife as a means of ensuring comprehensive support that addresses both their medical and emotional needs.

This study aligns with Liu et al. (2021) in that as this study focused on the availability of midwife-led perinatal care and its impact on accessibility and convenience, Liu et al. (2021) explored the specific elements of intrapartum care that influenced women's satisfaction levels. Nonetheless, both studies underscored the importance of tailored support and personalized interventions in meeting women's needs and preferences during childbirth.

The study identified ten main themes and twenty-one subthemes, revealing different facets of pregnant women's interactions and communication with midwives during prenatal visits. Among these, "Clear Communication and Information Sharing" emerged as a crucial element in pregnant women's experiences with midwife-led perinatal care. Specifically, participants emphasized the importance of transparent communication, expressing gratitude for midwives who conveyed information clearly, attentively listened to their concerns, and offered detailed explanations about their care. Participants valued midwives who took the initiative to clarify procedures and address inquiries, enabling them to gain a better understanding of their pregnancy journey and enhancing their preparedness for childbirth. Central to this finding is the empowerment derived from knowledge. Clear communication empowers pregnant women by equipping them with the necessary information and understanding to make informed decisions about their pregnancy and childbirth journey. When midwives convey information in a transparent and comprehensible manner, actively listen to women's concerns, and offer detailed explanations about their care, it fosters a sense of agency and autonomy among expectant mothers. This empowerment through knowledge enables women to navigate their healthcare journey with confidence and assurance, actively participating in decision-making processes regarding their well-being and that of their unborn child. Moreover, transparent communication plays a crucial role in establishing trust and

confidence between pregnant women and midwives. When midwives take the initiative to clarify procedures, address inquiries, and provide comprehensive information, it demonstrates their commitment to delivering high-quality, woman-centered care.

This finding aligns with Iida et al. (2021) in Japan also emphasizes the importance of continuity and relationship-building in midwifery care. The women in this study experienced a profound sense of "closeness and connection" with the midwives providing team-based care. They appreciated the consistent involvement of the same team of midwives throughout their pregnancy and postpartum period, which fostered a trusting relationship and a feeling of security. This continuity of care empowered the women and contributed to their overall sense of well-being and satisfaction with the childbirth experience. Both studies highlight the role of midwives in providing personalized, woman-centred care that prioritizes communication, continuity, and trust. While the specific cultural contexts and healthcare systems may differ between the two studies, the findings underscore universal principles of effective midwifery care that prioritize the needs and preferences of pregnant women, promote positive birth experiences, and empower women throughout the childbirth journey.

In relation to "Timely and Accessible Information," participants emphasized the significance of midwives being readily available and responsive in delivering timely information and assistance. They appreciated the accessibility of midwives, noting their promptness in responding to calls and messages. This accessibility stood in contrast to their experiences with doctors, where participants perceived a lack of availability and communication. Being able to easily contact midwives for information and support was viewed as reassuring and essential in building trust and assurance in the care provided. One reason for this finding is the emphasis on continuity of care and relationship-building in midwifery practice. Both studies highlight the importance of consistent involvement of the same team of midwives throughout pregnancy and the postpartum period. This continuity fosters a trusting relationship between pregnant women and midwives, as they develop familiarity and rapport over time. By experiencing care from the same group of midwives, women feel supported, understood, and valued, leading to a profound sense of "closeness and connection" as described in the study by Iida et al. This continuity of care empowers women to actively engage in decision-making processes and enhances their overall satisfaction with the childbirth experience. Another reason for this finding is the emphasis on personalized, woman-centred care in midwifery practice. Both studies underscore the importance of midwives providing care that is tailored to the individual needs, preferences, and cultural backgrounds of pregnant women. By prioritizing communication, continuity, and trust, midwives create a supportive and nurturing environment where women feel empowered to make informed choices about their pregnancy and childbirth journey. This personalized approach to care promotes positive birth experiences, as women receive the emotional support, guidance, and encouragement they need to navigate the challenges of pregnancy and childbirth. Ultimately, both studies highlight the universal principles of effective midwifery care that prioritize the holistic well-being of pregnant women and promote positive outcomes for mothers and babies alike.

In "Increased awareness of pregnancy changes," participants highlighted the supportive environment fostered by midwives, where women felt comfortable asking questions and gaining deeper insights into physiological changes during pregnancy. Participants stressed the importance of establishing friendly relationships with midwives, enabling them to seek information about various pregnancy aspects, including care needs, foetal health, and future plans. One reason for this finding could be the positive impact of a supportive and approachable healthcare environment on pregnant women's engagement and information-seeking behavior. When women feel comfortable and encouraged to ask questions and discuss their concerns with midwives, they are more likely to actively seek out information about pregnancy-related topics. Establishing friendly relationships with midwives creates a conducive atmosphere where women feel valued, respected, and listened to, fostering trust and open communication. As a result, women feel empowered to seek deeper insights into physiological changes during pregnancy and to discuss various aspects of their care, including prenatal needs, fetal health, and future plans. This supportive environment not only enhances women's knowledge and understanding but also promotes their overall sense of confidence and preparedness for childbirth and motherhood. This finding aligns with Shahinfar et al. (2021) found that the trust women placed in their midwives, viewing them as highly knowledgeable, skilled, and compassionate professionals. This trust facilitated open discussions and addressing concerns, contributing to women's empowerment. While this theme does not directly address the aspect of increased awareness of pregnancy changes, it underscores the positive influence of midwives' expertise and supportive interactions on women's confidence and preparedness for childbirth. This finding aligns with the notion of midwives fostering women's empowerment and positive experiences throughout the maternity journey, as observed in the study's central theme of "Maternal Empowerment."

Regarding "Enhanced maternal healthcare-seeking behaviour," participants noted the influence of midwives' guidance on women's healthcare-seeking behaviour. They reported that advice from trusted midwives positively impacted their decision-making process and reduced delays in seeking necessary care. By following midwives' recommendations, participants ensured timely attendance to hospital appointments, demonstrating proactive engagement with their healthcare needs. The finding reflects the pivotal role of midwives in influencing pregnant women's decisions and actions related to their health during pregnancy. One reason for this finding is the trust that participants placed in their midwives. Throughout the perinatal care process, participants likely developed a strong sense of trust in their midwives due to the rapport and relationship established over time. This trust is fundamental in healthcare-seeking behaviour, as it instils confidence in the midwives' expertise and guidance. As a result, participants were more inclined to heed their midwives' recommendations promptly, knowing that they were receiving reliable advice tailored to their individual needs and circumstances. Additionally, the proactive engagement demonstrated by participants underscores their commitment to prioritizing their health and well-being during pregnancy. By following their midwives' recommendations and attending hospital appointments without delay, participants displayed a proactive approach to managing their healthcare needs. This proactive behaviour may stem from the sense of

responsibility instilled by midwives, who likely emphasize the importance of regular check-ups and timely interventions for ensuring a healthy pregnancy outcome. Furthermore, the supportive environment fostered by midwives, where women feel comfortable asking questions and seeking information, likely encourages proactive engagement with healthcare. Overall, the combination of trust in midwives and proactive engagement contributes to enhanced maternal healthcare-seeking behaviour among pregnant women, ultimately promoting positive pregnancy outcomes and maternal well-being. This finding aligns with Liu et al. (2021) who highlighted the importance of midwife-led care in promoting positive childbirth experiences and satisfaction, the study on enhanced maternal healthcare-seeking behaviour emphasizes the critical role of midwives in guiding women towards timely and appropriate healthcare decisions.

The participants emphasized the pivotal role of enhancing the relationship between midwives and women, highlighting its profound impact on the childbirth experience. They stressed the cultivation of trusting relationships, enabling empowerment and active involvement in decision-making processes. Participants expressed comfort and connection during midwife-led perinatal care, attributing it to the ease of establishing trust and friendship, which alleviates fear and encourages participation in decision-making. Such relationships fostered trust and confidence in women's birthing abilities, reducing anxiety and promoting autonomy in decisions regarding antenatal, childbirth, and postnatal care. One reason for the finding emphasizing the pivotal role of enhancing the relationship between midwives and women is the establishment of trust and rapport. Throughout the perinatal care journey, participants likely experienced consistent and supportive interactions with their midwives, fostering a sense of trust and confidence in the care provided. Trust is foundational in any healthcare relationship, and when women feel supported and understood by their midwives, they are more likely to actively engage in decision-making processes. This trust enables women to express their preferences, concerns, and fears openly, knowing that their midwives will listen attentively and provide personalized support. As a result, the cultivation of trusting relationships between midwives and women promotes empowerment and autonomy, ultimately enhancing the childbirth experience and promoting positive outcomes for both mother and baby. This finding aligns with Iida et al. (2021) who noted that continuity of care empowered women, even after discharge, and facilitated a sense of closeness, connection, and security throughout the entire childbirth experience. Both studies underscore the importance of the relationship between midwives and women in promoting empowerment, trust, and a positive childbirth experience.

Some participants expressed a preference for receiving care from various midwives, citing differences in knowledge, skill, and empathy among them. They believed accessing care from different midwives could provide well-rounded, high-quality care tailored to individual needs. This approach reflects a commitment to providing personalized and comprehensive care throughout the continuum of pregnancy and childbirth. Overall, participants emphasized the profound significance of personalized care in maternity, emphasizing the importance of the relationship between midwives and their clients. One reason for the finding could be that participants recognized that different midwives bring unique knowledge, skills, and empathetic

approaches to their practice. They believed that accessing care from various midwives would expose them to a diverse range of expertise and approaches, allowing for a more holistic understanding of their healthcare needs. By experiencing different styles of care, participants felt they could benefit from a broader spectrum of knowledge and support tailored to their individual preferences and circumstances. Another reason could be that participants valued the personalized and comprehensive care offered by midwives who took the time to understand their individual needs and preferences. They believed that receiving care from various midwives would ensure that their healthcare needs were addressed in a well-rounded manner. This approach reflects a commitment to providing tailored care that acknowledges the uniqueness of each client and prioritizes their physical, emotional, and psychological well-being throughout the continuum of pregnancy and childbirth. Overall, participants emphasized the importance of building strong relationships with midwives who can provide personalized support and guidance based on mutual trust and understanding.

Participants emphasized the importance of tailoring care to individual needs, where personalized midwifery care acknowledges the unique characteristics of each client and customizes care plans accordingly. They noted that midwives dedicate time to listen to their concerns, values, and birth preferences, ensuring that care aligns with their specific needs. This personalized approach empowers women to actively engage in their childbirth experience, fostering a sense of agency and empowerment. One reason for the finding could be that participants appreciated the personalized approach of midwifery care, as it made them feel valued and respected as individuals. By tailoring care plans to their specific needs, midwives demonstrated a commitment to addressing their concerns and preferences, which contributed to higher levels of patient satisfaction. Feeling heard and understood by their midwives encouraged participants to actively engage in their childbirth experience, leading to a greater sense of ownership and empowerment throughout the process. Another reason could be that the personalized nature of midwifery care has been linked to improved health outcomes and overall well-being for pregnant women. By customizing care plans according to individual needs, midwives can address specific health concerns, preferences, and risk factors, thereby optimizing maternal and fetal health outcomes. Empowering women to actively participate in decision-making regarding their care can also lead to greater adherence to treatment plans and healthier lifestyle choices, ultimately resulting in improved pregnancy outcomes and overall satisfaction with the childbirth experience. Thus, the emphasis on tailoring care to individual needs reflects a commitment to promoting optimal health and well-being for pregnant women under midwifery care.

Furthermore, participants highlighted the provision of consistent support from the same midwife throughout the perinatal journey as a defining feature of personalized midwifery care. This continuity fosters a deep bond between the midwife and client, enabling personalized support and guidance at every stage of childbirth. Participants valued the assurance of having the same midwife throughout, knowing that their history and preferences were understood and respected. One reason for the finding could be that consistent support from the same midwife allows for the development of a strong bond and trust between the midwife and the client. Over time, as the

midwife becomes familiar with the client's medical history, preferences, and individual needs, a trusting relationship is cultivated. This trust and rapport are essential for effective communication, as clients feel more comfortable expressing their concerns and preferences, leading to more personalized and tailored care. Additionally, knowing that they have a dedicated and familiar caregiver throughout the perinatal journey provides clients with a sense of security and reassurance, contributing to a positive childbirth experience. Another reason could be that the continuity of care provided by the same midwife ensures consistency in the provision of support and guidance throughout the perinatal journey. This consistency allows for personalized support and guidance at every stage of childbirth, from prenatal visits to labour and postpartum care. By having a midwife who is familiar with their medical history and preferences, clients receive more comprehensive and holistic care that addresses their individual needs. Moreover, consistent support from the same midwife promotes better coordination of care and reduces the likelihood of miscommunication or gaps in care delivery, ultimately leading to improved maternal and neonatal outcomes.

Additionally, participants underscored the role of personalized midwifery care in providing emotional support, where midwives offer companionship and empathy to pregnant women. Serving as confidantes, midwives provide encouragement and reassurance during vulnerable moments, contributing to a positive birth experience. This emotional support not only alleviates anxiety and reduces stress but also enhances communication and trust, ultimately leading to positive birth outcomes by addressing the holistic needs of pregnant women. One reason for the finding could be that Pregnant women often experience heightened levels of anxiety and stress during pregnancy, particularly during labor and childbirth. By offering emotional support, midwives help alleviate these feelings of anxiety and stress, creating a more conducive environment for childbirth. Through companionship, empathy, and encouragement, midwives provide reassurance to pregnant women, helping them feel more relaxed and confident in their ability to cope with labor and childbirth. Additionally, emotional support from midwives fosters open communication and trust between the midwife and the pregnant woman. When pregnant women feel supported and listened to, they are more likely to communicate their concerns, preferences, and fears openly. This improved communication allows midwives to better understand the needs and desires of pregnant women, enabling them to provide more personalized care. As a result, pregnant women feel more empowered and involved in their childbirth experience, leading to greater satisfaction and positive birth outcomes.

The participants in the study focused on the empowerment of women in maternity care, highlighting the importance of respecting their autonomy and right to self-determination throughout the childbirth process. They emphasized that each woman is unique and has the ability to make decisions that align with her values, preferences, and needs. One reason for the finding could be that participants recognized the significance of respecting women's autonomy and individuality in maternity care. They acknowledged that every woman has unique values, preferences, and needs when it comes to childbirth. By emphasizing the importance of respecting women's autonomy, participants advocated for a person-centred approach to maternity care that

prioritizes women's rights to make decisions about their own bodies and childbirth experiences. Another reason could be that they recognized that providing women with access to comprehensive, evidence-based information enables them to make informed choices about their maternity care. By empowering women to weigh their options, ask questions, and express their preferences, participants believed that women could make decisions that are aligned with their values and goals, ultimately leading to more positive childbirth experiences.

Furthermore, participants underscored the significance of autonomy and self-determination, noting that midwives empower pregnant women by providing comprehensive information, fostering open communication, and involving them in decision-making. They expressed that being part of the decision-making process made them feel in control of their pregnancy and birth, boosting their confidence in advocating for themselves and their baby. One reason for this finding could be that by actively participating in decisions about their care, they felt a greater sense of control over their pregnancy and birth experiences. This empowerment not only enhanced their confidence in advocating for themselves but also instilled a deeper sense of ownership over their maternity journey. By providing comprehensive information and engaging in collaborative discussions, midwives built rapport with pregnant women, creating a supportive environment where women felt comfortable expressing their preferences and concerns. This enhanced communication and trust contributed to a positive caregiver-patient relationship, ultimately leading to more satisfying maternity experiences for women.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the participants have favourable perceptions and positive birth experiences. Overall, the study highlighted pregnant women's deep appreciation for the holistic and woman-centred approach of midwifery-led perinatal care, emphasizing the pivotal role midwives play in promoting positive birth experiences and maternal well-being. The participants emphasized the invaluable support and guidance provided by knowledgeable and empathetic midwives, who not only offered personalized care but also empowered women to actively participate in decision-making regarding their health. The findings underscored the trust and confidence pregnant women placed in midwives, viewing them as primary caregivers throughout pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period. Moreover, the study illuminated the convenience and accessibility of midwifery services, with flexible appointment scheduling and proximity to healthcare facilities facilitating regular check-ups and timely access to essential maternity care. Continuity of care emerged as a cornerstone of the midwifery experience, with participants valuing the consistency of having the same midwife throughout their pregnancy. This continuity fostered a sense of familiarity and ensured that midwives were attuned to each woman's unique needs and preferences.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made to further enhance midwifery-led perinatal care and address the needs and preferences of pregnant women:

Health systems should prioritize policies and practices that promote continuity of care, ensuring that pregnant women have the opportunity to build trusting relationships with midwives throughout their maternity journey. This may involve assigning the same midwife to women for antenatal, intrapartum, and postnatal care whenever possible.

Health professionals, including midwives, should receive comprehensive training and education on providing woman-centred care, effective communication, and cultural sensitivity. This will enable them to better understand and respond to the diverse needs of pregnant women, fostering a supportive and respectful care environment.

Healthcare facilities should strive to improve the accessibility and convenience of midwifery-led perinatal care by offering flexible appointment scheduling, ensuring proximity to communities, and providing affordable services. This can help reduce barriers to accessing essential maternity care and promote timely interventions when needed.

Midwives should prioritize providing emotional support and empowerment to pregnant women, acknowledging the psychological and emotional aspects of pregnancy and childbirth. This may involve offering counselling, reassurance, and encouragement, as well as involving women in decision-making regarding their care.

Community Engagement: Healthcare providers and policymakers should engage with communities to raise awareness about the benefits of midwifery-led perinatal care and address any misconceptions or barriers to accessing these services. This can be done through community outreach programs, educational initiatives, and partnerships with local organizations.

By implementing these recommendations, healthcare systems can further improve the quality of midwifery-led perinatal care and better meet the needs of pregnant women, ultimately leading to positive maternal and neonatal outcomes.

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