

“The midwife helped me. Otherwise I could have lost my life”

Women’s perception, utilization and experience of a professional midwifery service in rural Afghanistan

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Background

Afghanistan has one of the highest maternal mortality ratios (MMR) in the world. Only a minority of the women have access to a skilled birth attendant and most women are giving birth attended by a traditional birth attendant. Since 2012 Norwegian organizations have supported the education of community midwives in Afghanistan.

The aim of this study is to explore women’s perception, utilization and experience of professional midwifery care in the time around childbirth in two provinces of Afghanistan



Methodology

An explorative case study approach was adopted. In addition to participatory observation, 14 in-depth interviews and four Focus Group Discussions were performed with all together 39 women who had given birth during the last six months, mothers-in-laws as well as community midwives in the provinces Kunar and Laghman. Data were analysed through a thematic content analysis

Findings

The women expressed that the midwives’ level of knowledge, care, skills and ability to save lives were important reasons for giving birth in a clinic. They appreciated the midwives’ actions to promote immediate skin-to-skin contact and early breastfeeding. Lack of permission from their relatives to visit the clinics and problems with transport were some of the obstacles for using the health facilities

Conclusion

Education and deployment of professional midwives seem to impact the use of midwifery service and improvement of maternal and infant morbidity and mortality in rural Afghanistan

“I had three children at home with a lot of problems. My neighbour advised me to go to the clinic [...]. When I went there the midwives behaved so well and I was very happy and satisfied. After the delivery I had a very serious bleeding. However the midwife helped me and gave me medicine. Otherwise I could have lost my life” (Khandan, 30)

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the women and midwives in the provinces Kunar and Laghman who participated in this study, as well as their mothers, sisters and mothers-in-laws