

Review Article

Compassion in Childbirth: Transforming Maternal and Neonatal Care Respectful Maternity Care and its Impact on Maternal and Neonatal Outcomes

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A B S T R A C T

Respectful Maternity Care (RMC) is gaining wider recognition as an essential human right and a critical component of high-quality maternal healthcare. Even with improvements in obstetric care, disrespect and abuse during childbirth continue widely, negatively influencing women's health-seeking actions and overall well-being. This narrative review consolidates evidence emphasizing the value of respectful maternity care and its effects on maternal outcomes. A review of literature from databases including PubMed, CINAHL, and Google Scholar reveals that respectful maternity care defined by dignity, privacy, autonomy, and compassionate communication leads to higher maternal satisfaction, more facility-based deliveries, lower levels of anxiety and postpartum trauma, and improved clinical outcomes. Barriers to implementation include heavy provider workloads, insufficient training, and weak policy enforcement. Obstetric and gynaecological nurses are essential in putting RMC principles into practice by fostering compassionate communication, ensuring informed consent, and standing up for patients' rights. Incorporating RMC into nursing education, institutional procedures, and health policies is crucial for fostering positive childbirth experiences and enhancing maternal outcomes.²

Keywords: Respectful Maternity Care (RMC), Maternal Health, Neonatal Outcomes, Quality of Care, Maternal, Neonatal Well-being

Introduction

Respectful Maternity Care (RMC) ensures dignity, privacy, informed consent, and freedom from abuse during childbirth. This review highlights that disrespectful care remains common and negatively affects maternal experiences and healthcare utilization. RMC is associated with improved maternal satisfaction, reduced stress, and increased use of institutional delivery services.⁶ While direct evidence on maternal and neonatal clinical outcomes

is limited, RMC indirectly improves outcomes through better communication, timely care-seeking, and enhanced postnatal practices such as breastfeeding. Integrating RMC into healthcare systems is essential for improving quality of care and maternal-neonatal well-being.⁷

Concept of Respectful Maternity Care

- Dignity and Respect: - treating every woman kindly and empathetically without any humiliation, abuse, or neglect.¹⁸

- **Privacy and Confidentiality:** - maintaining physical privacy during examination and delivery and keeping all medical information confidential.¹⁸
- **Informed Choice and Consent:** - clearly explaining procedures, taking permission before any intervention, and respecting the woman's decisions.⁶
- **Continuous Support and Communication:** - providing emotional and physical support during labour with clear, respectful communication, encouragement, and reassurance.^{18,19}
- **Freedom from Abuse and Discrimination:** - ensuring no verbal, physical, or emotional abuse and providing equal care regardless of age, caste, religion, or socioeconomic status.^{19,11}

Impact On Maternal & Neonatal Outcomes

Impact on Maternal outcomes

- **Maternal Satisfaction and Experience:** Respectful Maternity Care (RMC) improves maternal satisfaction. It increases a woman's sense of dignity, autonomy, and control during childbirth. Women receiving RMC report a more positive birth experience. It is also associated with higher psychological comfort and reduced childbirth trauma.^{14,6}
- **Psychological Health Benefits:** RMC improves maternal psychological health. It reduces the risk of postpartum depression, anxiety, and fear of childbirth. Women who experience disrespectful care are more likely to develop negative emotional outcomes and birth-related trauma.^{11,19}
- **Increased Institutional Delivery and Service Utilization:** RMC increases trust in healthcare services. Women who receive respectful care are more likely to opt for institutional delivery. It also improves antenatal and postnatal care attendance, leading to better monitoring during pregnancy.^{14,6}
- **Reduction in Maternal Complications:** RMC indirectly reduces maternal complications. It promotes early detection of obstetric emergencies such as postpartum haemorrhage and preeclampsia. It also improves timely healthcare-seeking behaviour, which helps reduce maternal morbidity.^{10,7}

Impact on Neonatal outcomes

- **Improved Neonatal Survival:** Respectful Maternity Care (RMC) improves neonatal survival indirectly. Systematic reviews show that RMC is associated with timely obstetric intervention and better intrapartum monitoring. It also contributes to a reduction in birth asphyxia.^{16,17}
- **Better Immediate New-born Care:** RMC promotes better immediate newborn care practices. It

encourages early skin-to-skin contact between mother and newborn. It also supports early initiation of breastfeeding and improved thermal care of the newborn. These practices help in reducing neonatal complications.^{7,18}

- **Reduced Neonatal Morbidity:** RMC is associated with reduced neonatal morbidity. Studies show improvements in APGAR scores, reduced risk of neonatal infections, and better physiological adaptation of the new born after birth.¹⁷

Barriers to Respectful Maternity Care:

- **Health System–Related Barriers:** Overcrowded wards, staff shortage, poor infrastructure, and lack of equipment reduce the ability to provide respectful maternity care.^{11,13,7}
- **Healthcare Provider–Related Barriers:** Lack of training, burnout, poor communication, and normalization of disrespectful behaviour affect RMC implementation.^{11,13}
- **Patient–Related Barriers:** Low awareness of rights, poor health literacy, and fear of negative treatment prevent women from demanding respectful care.^{11,19}
- **Socio-Cultural Barriers:** Gender inequality, caste and economic disparities, and acceptance of disrespect as normal hinder respectful maternity care.^{14,19}
- **Organizational and Policy Barriers:** Weak guidelines, poor monitoring systems, and lack of accountability reduce the practice of RMC in facilities.^{7,13}
- **Communication Barriers:** Language differences and inadequate communication during labour lead to poor understanding and lack of informed consent.^{6,18}
- **Economic Barriers:** Limited funding and urban–rural inequality restrict access to quality and respectful maternity care.^{7,10}
- **Systemic Barriers:** RMC is affected by poor health system design, unequal resources, and lack of supportive workplace environment.^{10,11}

Integration of Respectful Maternity Care into Health Programs in India

Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA)

The Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA) was officially launched by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MoHFW), Government of India, on June 9, 2016. It is a nationwide program designed to provide fixed-day, assured, comprehensive, and quality antenatal care (ANC) to all pregnant women in their second or third trimesters on the 9th of every month.¹

LaQshya – Labour Room Quality Improvement Initiative

Respectful Maternity Care (RMC), which ensures dignity, privacy, and compassionate care, is increasingly embedded in maternal health initiatives in India. The LaQshya – Labour Room Quality Improvement Initiative (2017) focuses on improving the quality of intrapartum and postpartum care while promoting respectful practices in labour rooms and maternity operation theatres, thereby enhancing maternal satisfaction and service utilization.²

SUMAN (Surakshit Matritva Aashwasan) Programme (2019):

SUMAN strengthens Respectful Maternity Care (RMC) by ensuring free, dignified, and zero-denial healthcare services for all pregnant women, mothers, and newborns at public health facilities, promoting timely care-seeking and reducing maternal and neonatal deaths.³ Recent Update on 29th June 2026 - The Government launched the SUMAN Roadmap 2030 to accelerate progress towards SDG maternal and new born health targets. It focuses on 130 high-burden districts in 13 States, aiming to reduce the Maternal Mortality Ratio below 70 by 2030 through quality care, AI-enabled labour rooms, JANANI Portal-based high-risk pregnancy tracking, strengthened emergency obstetric services, and 24x7 support systems.²¹

Mukhyamantri Matrushakti Yojana

At the state level, Gujarat initiatives such as the Mukhyamantri Matrushakti Yojana (2022) support maternal nutrition and provide financial assistance to pregnant and lactating women. These schemes indirectly promote RMC by improving maternal well-being and encouraging institutional deliveries.⁴

Namo Shree Yojana

The Namu Shree Yojana (also known as NAMO Shri Scheme) is a 2024 initiative by the Gujarat government designed to provide ₹12,000 in financial assistance to pregnant and lactating women. While primarily focusing on nutrition and financial support, it intersects with “respectful maternity care” by encouraging institutional deliveries to ensure safe, dignified, and quality healthcare for mothers and newborns.⁵

Discussion

Respectful Maternity Care (RMC) is a fundamental component of quality maternal healthcare, encompassing dignity, privacy, informed consent, effective communication, and freedom from abuse. This review shows that national initiatives such as PMSMA, LaQshya, and SUMAN, along with Gujarat-based schemes like Mukhyamantri Matrushakti

Yojana and Namu Shree Yojana, reflect a strong policy commitment to integrating RMC into healthcare systems.^{7,18}

RMC positively influences maternal outcomes by improving satisfaction and psychological well-being and reducing childbirth-related stress and trauma. It also enhances trust in health facilities, increasing utilization of antenatal, intranasal, and postnatal services, thereby indirectly reducing maternal complications through timely interventions. Neonatal outcomes benefit through improved practices such as early breastfeeding, skin-to-skin contact, and better monitoring, leading to reduced morbidity and improved survival.

However, multiple barriers persist, including overcrowding, staff shortages, inadequate infrastructure, provider burnout, poor communication, socio-cultural inequalities, and weak policy enforcement. Limited awareness among women and financial constraints further restrict access to respectful care.^{11,13}

To address these challenges, strengthening provider training, ensuring accountability, improving infrastructure, and integrating RMC into nursing education and protocols are essential. Promoting awareness of patient rights and fostering supportive healthcare environments can enhance the consistent implementation of respectful maternity care.

Conclusion

Recent studies consistently conclude that Respectful Maternity Care (RMC) is essential for improving the quality of maternal and newborn health services. Evidence indicates that RMC enhances maternal satisfaction, emotional well-being, and trust in healthcare systems, leading to increased utilization of institutional delivery and antenatal care services. It also indirectly improves neonatal outcomes through better intrapartum monitoring and early newborn care practices.

The integration of RMC into national programs such as PMSMA, LaQshya, and SUMAN, along with supportive state-level initiatives in Gujarat, reflects a growing commitment to providing respectful and equitable care. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, staff shortages, provider burnout, socio-cultural inequalities, and limited awareness among women continue to hinder its effective implementation.

However, despite these benefits, gaps remain in direct evidence linking RMC to reductions in maternal and neonatal mortality. Ongoing barriers such as staff shortages, inadequate training, and weak health system implementation continue to affect its practice. Therefore, strengthening RMC through policy enforcement, workforce

training, and system-level improvements is crucial for achieving safe, respectful, and high-quality maternity care.

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