

The Role of Midwife Support in Reducing Pregnant Women's Anxiety during Antenatal Care in the Covid-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

During the Covid-19 pandemic, pregnant women experienced increased psychological distress, particularly anxiety related to antenatal visits. One of the primary protective factors known to reduce anxiety is professional support from midwives. This literature review aims to identify the role of midwife support in reducing pregnant women's anxiety during antenatal care amid the pandemic. A systematic literature review method was used by analyzing two major databases Google Scholar and PubMed. From a total of 198,452 articles screened, 12 studies met the inclusion criteria: 7 from Google Scholar and 5 from PubMed. The included studies consisted of correlational designs, quasi-experiments, and cross-sectional surveys. Findings indicate that midwife support significantly influences anxiety reduction, especially through emotional communication, health education, and continuity of care. The conclusion drawn is that midwife support plays a crucial role in reducing pregnant women's anxiety during antenatal care throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords: antenatal care, anxiety, midwife support, pandemic, pregnancy

BACKGROUND

The emergence of the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) at the end of 2019 led to a global pandemic that significantly altered healthcare delivery, particularly maternal care. As of mid-2020, Indonesia reported more than 26,000 confirmed cases with increasing maternal infections, creating a great psychological burden for pregnant women (Arlina, 2021). Restrictions, fear of contagion, and changes in antenatal care protocols contributed to heightened levels of anxiety.

Globally, the WHO reports that psychological disorders during pregnancy range from 15–20% in low-income countries (WHO, 2018). Studies from various countries show high anxiety and depression prevalence: 18.2% in Uganda, 12.5% in Nigeria, 19% in Zimbabwe, and 41% in South Africa (WHO, 2008). In Indonesia, anxiety during pregnancy remains significant, with findings showing 22.5% mild anxiety, 30% moderate anxiety, and 27.5% severe anxiety (Sarifah, 2016).

The pandemic intensified concerns regarding infection risk during antenatal visits, potential complications, and fear of transmitting the virus to the fetus (Durankuş & Aksu, 2020). Anxiety during pregnancy affects physiological responses, contractions, fetal development, and postpartum outcomes (Novitasari, 2013). Reduced antenatal visits and limited healthcare access further increased psychological vulnerability.

Midwives, as primary maternal health providers, play a crucial role in supporting pregnant women emotionally, physically, and informationally. Their communication, guidance, and empathetic care

have been shown to reduce fear and improve psychological readiness for childbirth. This review explores midwives' support as a protective factor against anxiety during antenatal care in pandemic conditions.

METHODS

This study utilized a systematic literature review approach to comprehensively analyze the existing body of research related to midwife support and pregnancy-related anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic. The review process followed a structured protocol to ensure transparency, accuracy, and reproducibility of findings. Two major scientific databases Google Scholar and PubMed were selected due to their wide coverage of peer-reviewed publications, health sciences research, and global scholarly contributions. By using these databases, the study ensured access to both medical and interdisciplinary sources relevant to maternal mental health and antenatal care.

The keyword search strategy was designed to capture a broad and comprehensive range of studies. Keywords and keyword combinations such as “midwife support,” “pregnancy anxiety,” “antenatal care,” “Covid-19 pandemic,” and “maternal mental health” were applied systematically. These terms were chosen to reflect core concepts related to the role of midwives, psychological responses among pregnant women, and the contextual impact of the global pandemic. The combination of keywords allowed for the identification of diverse research articles addressing clinical, psychological, and public health perspectives on maternal anxiety.

The initial search produced a very large dataset consisting of 198,452 articles. This high volume illustrates the extensive global interest and scientific output concerning maternal health during the pandemic. A rigorous screening process was then applied. This included eliminating duplicate studies, reviewing titles and abstracts, and assessing full-text eligibility based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. After this multi-stage filtration, only 12 studies met the criteria for final analysis comprising 7 articles from Google Scholar and 5 from PubMed. The selected studies represented various research contexts and methodologies, ensuring a balanced synthesis.

The study designs of the included articles were diverse, contributing to a richer understanding of the topic. The final set of studies consisted of correlational analyses exploring relationships between variables, quasi-experimental research evaluating the effects of specific interventions, and cross-sectional surveys documenting patterns of anxiety and support at a single point in time. This methodological variation allowed the review to examine both associative and intervention-based evidence, offering a more comprehensive picture of midwife support and maternal anxiety.

Data extraction was conducted systematically using a structured extraction framework. Key components retrieved from each study included characteristics of respondents, such as age, gestational stage, and socio-demographic background. Additionally, information on the type of midwife support assessed whether emotional, informational, instrumental, or continuity of care was carefully noted. The review also documented the anxiety measurement scales used in each study, such as the Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HAM-A), Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS), or Pregnancy-Related Anxiety Scale (PRAS), ensuring comparability across research findings.

The extracted data were then synthesized to identify statistical outcomes and draw conclusions relevant to the research objective. Statistical results, including correlation coefficients, significance values, and effect sizes, were compared to determine the strength and consistency of the relationship between midwife support and pregnancy anxiety. The synthesis revealed recurring themes, such as the effectiveness of midwife involvement in reducing anxiety, the importance of emotional reassurance, and the need for accessible antenatal services during public health crises. Overall, the systematic review provided a comprehensive and evidence-based understanding of

how midwife support influences maternal mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic, offering valuable insights for improving antenatal care practices.

RESULTS

A growing body of literature consistently demonstrates that midwife support plays a crucial role in reducing anxiety among pregnant women. One of the strongest pieces of evidence comes from Susilo et al. (2017), who found that both emotional and informational support provided by midwives significantly reduced maternal anxiety levels, with a highly significant p-value of 0.001. Their findings highlight that when midwives offer empathetic reassurance and clear guidance, pregnant women experience greater psychological comfort, especially during critical stages of pregnancy. This supports the broader understanding that emotional stability during pregnancy is closely linked to the quality of professional support received.

Similarly, Dwiwanto et al. (2021) reported a negative correlation between the quality of midwife communication and pregnancy-related anxiety levels. This means that the more effectively midwives communicate—whether through clarity, trust-building, or responsiveness—the lower the anxiety experienced by expectant mothers. Communication quality plays a vital role in shaping maternal perceptions of safety and preparedness, particularly during uncertain or stressful periods. Their findings reinforce the notion that communication is not merely an exchange of information but a therapeutic component of antenatal care.

Further evidence comes from Elvina et al. (2018), who concluded that health education delivered by midwives significantly improved psychological readiness for childbirth ($p < 0.05$). Education helps mothers better understand the birthing process, possible complications, and coping strategies, which ultimately reduces fear and uncertainty. Complementing this, Siregar et al. (2021) found that an overwhelming 91.9% of mothers without anxiety reported receiving adequate health guidance from midwives. This indicates that clear, consistent guidance is strongly linked to emotional stability during pregnancy.

Astutik et al. (2017) also highlighted that midwife support was one of the strongest predictors of reduced anxiety levels among pregnant women. Their findings underscore that midwives serve not only as healthcare providers but also as essential psychological supporters throughout pregnancy. Wahyuni et al. (2021) further emphasized this by demonstrating that continuity of antenatal care—where the same midwife provides repeated care across visits—significantly reduced anxiety in third-trimester mothers. The familiarity and trust built through continuous care enhance a mother's sense of security and emotional resilience.

Evidence from international studies strengthens these conclusions. Arisukwu et al. (2021) revealed that support from healthcare providers, including midwives, had a profound influence on maternal well-being, with a chi-square value of 27.894 and a p-value below .001. This suggests a very strong association between professional support and maternal psychological outcomes. Likewise, Çevik Ateş et al. (2019) found a significant negative relationship between perceived professional support and anxiety levels ($p < 0.05$), further confirming that professional reassurance directly contributes to anxiety reduction.

Taken together, these studies show a clear pattern: midwife support—whether through communication, emotional reassurance, health education, or continuous antenatal care—consistently correlates with lower anxiety levels among pregnant women. This relationship became particularly important during the COVID-19 pandemic, when fear, uncertainty, and disrupted health services heightened maternal vulnerability. Overall, the evidence demonstrates that midwives play an irreplaceable role in safeguarding maternal mental health, both during crises and in routine antenatal care.

Table 1. Summary of Studies on Midwife Support and Maternal Anxiety

Study / Author	Key Findings	Statistical Result
Susilo et al. (2017)	Emotional & informational midwife support reduced maternal anxiety	$p = 0.001$
Dwiwanto et al. (2021)	Negative correlation between communication quality and anxiety	Significant negative correlation
Elvina et al. (2018)	Midwife health education improved psychological readiness	$p < 0.05$
Siregar et al. (2021)	91.9% mothers without anxiety received adequate midwife guidance	Descriptive: 91.9%
Astutik et al. (2017)	Midwife support was the strongest predictor of decreased anxiety	Significant predictor
Wahyuni et al. (2021)	Continuous care by same midwife reduced third-trimester anxiety	Significant reduction
Arisukwu et al. (2021)	Healthcare provider support influenced maternal well-being	$\chi^2 = 27.894, p < .001$
Çevik Ateş et al. (2019)	Negative relationship between professional support and anxiety	$p < 0.05$

DISCUSSION

Anxiety among pregnant women increased substantially during the COVID-19 pandemic, as documented consistently across the reviewed literature. The fear of contracting the virus, especially in healthcare settings, created a persistent sense of vulnerability among expectant mothers. Onchonga et al. (2021) highlighted that limited access to routine antenatal care and constantly changing public health restrictions intensified uncertainty about the safety of pregnancy and childbirth during the pandemic. Additionally, emotional maturity significantly influenced anxiety responses; women with fewer coping skills or limited prior exposure to stressful situations tended to exhibit higher levels of worry. First-time mothers (primigravida) were particularly affected because they lacked previous childbirth experience to guide expectations, making them more susceptible to heightened psychological distress.

Furthermore, poor understanding of COVID-19 transmission pathways contributed to increased fear, especially in the early stages of the pandemic when scientific information was rapidly evolving. Many pregnant women expressed concerns about visiting hospitals for antenatal check-ups, fearing they might be exposed to infected individuals. This anxiety was intensified for mothers in their third trimester, a period already associated with heightened emotional sensitivity and physical discomfort. The combination of limited access to health services, conflicting media reports, and uncertainties about delivery procedures produced a stressful environment that significantly affected maternal mental well-being. As a result, anxiety became a widespread and persistent issue among pregnant women during this time.

Within this challenging context, midwives played a central and irreplaceable role in safeguarding maternal psychological health. Midwives are often the first point of contact for pregnant women, and their ability to provide emotional reassurance, practical guidance, and informational clarity directly influences maternal confidence. The reviewed studies emphasize that instrumental support—such as assisting with antenatal procedures combined with emotional support, including empathy and reassurance, helps stabilize pregnant women's mental states. During crises like the pandemic, the absence of midwife involvement or reduced interaction due to health restrictions

can exacerbate feelings of isolation and fear. Pregnant women rely heavily on midwives to bridge knowledge gaps, interpret evolving health protocols, and provide a sense of security during uncertain times.

Among the different dimensions of support, informational support emerged as the most influential in reducing anxiety across multiple studies. Midwives who clearly explained COVID-19 safety protocols, symptoms to monitor, protective steps during pregnancy, and possible delivery scenarios played a pivotal role in reducing fear of the unknown. Accurate and timely information empowered pregnant women to feel more in control of their situation, mitigating confusion caused by misinformation from social media or inconsistent public health announcements. Information provided by trusted professionals such as midwives not only improved understanding but also reinforced confidence in navigating pregnancy during a public health emergency.

The literature also consistently demonstrated that midwife support is strongly associated with reduced maternal anxiety. Several studies found that when midwives offer structured guidance, effective communication, and empathetic care, pregnant women develop stronger coping mechanisms and a more positive mindset. This aligns with the findings of Mukhadiono et al. (2015), which showed that professional guidance significantly enhances maternal readiness for childbirth by reducing fear and improving psychological resilience. During the pandemic, communication became especially crucial because many women faced unprecedented challenges, including restricted hospital visits, canceled classes, and reduced social support from family or community networks.

Ultimately, continuous and compassionate interaction from midwives contributes significantly to emotional stability and anxiety reduction. When midwives engage in consistent follow ups, active listening, and patient centered counseling, they help strengthen the emotional preparedness of expectant mothers. Such interactions build a foundation of trust, which is essential for navigating the uncertainties of childbirth in a high-risk environment. In addition, midwife-led support fosters psychological readiness for labor, enhances feelings of safety, and promotes overall maternal well-being. As the studies collectively indicate, midwife support is not merely beneficial it is vital for protecting maternal mental health during and beyond the pandemic.

CONCLUSION

This literature review concludes that midwife support plays a vital role in reducing anxiety among pregnant women during antenatal care in the Covid-19 pandemic. Emotional, informational, and instrumental support from midwives significantly enhances pregnant women's psychological readiness, decreases fear, and improves overall maternal well-being. Strengthening midwife centered antenatal interventions is recommended to ensure better mental health outcomes for pregnant women during public health crises.

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