"Safeguarding Motherhood Against All Odds: Nursing Strategies for Promoting Safe Motherhood in Low-Resource Settings"

Haobijan Madhubala Devi[1], Dr. Th. Bidyani Devi[2]
[1]PhD Scholar, [2]Research Supervisor
[1,2] Malwanchal University, Indore, M.P

Abstract: Safe motherhood remains a global public health priority, particularly in low-resource settings where preventable maternal morbidity and mortality continue to pose serious challenges. Despite global efforts, many women still experience pregnancy and childbirth without access to skilled care, adequate infrastructure, or timely emergency services. Nurses and midwives, as frontline healthcare providers, play a pivotal role in bridging these gaps and ensuring continuity of maternal care across the reproductive lifespan. This review article explores comprehensive nursing strategies that promote safe motherhood in low-resource settings, focusing on antenatal, intranatal, postnatal, and community-based interventions. It highlights evidence-based practices, task-shifting approaches, health education, respectful maternity care, and innovative low-cost solutions that nurses employ to reduce risks associated with pregnancy and childbirth. The article also discusses systemic challenges, ethical considerations, and future directions for strengthening nursing capacity to achieve sustainable improvements in maternal health outcomes. By emphasizing the central role of nurses, this review underscores the importance of empowering the nursing workforce to advance safe motherhood initiatives in resource-constrained environments.

Keywords: Safe motherhood, maternal health, low-resource settings, nursing strategies, maternal mortality, antenatal care, skilled birth attendance, community health nursing, respectful maternity care.

Introduction

Motherhood is a profound and transformative experience, yet for millions of women worldwide, pregnancy and childbirth remain life-threatening events. According to global estimates, the burden of maternal mortality is disproportionately concentrated in low-resource settings, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. These deaths are largely preventable and are often linked to factors such as lack of skilled care, poor access to health facilities, poverty, gender inequality, and weak health systems. Safe motherhood, defined as ensuring that women receive high-quality care during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period, is therefore a critical component of global health and human rights.

Nurses and midwives constitute the backbone of maternal healthcare delivery in low-resource settings. Often serving as the first—and sometimes the only—point of contact for pregnant women, nurses play a crucial role in providing essential maternal health services across the continuum of care. Their responsibilities extend beyond clinical care to include health education, advocacy, psychosocial support, and community engagement. In settings where physicians and specialists are scarce, nurses frequently assume expanded roles, making their contribution indispensable to the promotion of safe motherhood.

This review article aims to critically examine nursing strategies that promote safe motherhood in low-resource settings. By synthesizing existing literature and global best practices, the article provides an in-depth discussion of nursing interventions across antenatal, intranatal, postnatal, and community domains. It also addresses the challenges faced by nurses in these settings and proposes strategies to strengthen nursing practice and maternal health systems.

Concept of Safe Motherhood

The concept of safe motherhood emerged as a global initiative in the late 20th century, emphasizing the prevention of maternal deaths and disabilities associated with pregnancy and childbirth. Safe motherhood encompasses a holistic approach that includes access to family planning, skilled antenatal care, safe delivery services, emergency obstetric care, and postnatal follow-up. It recognizes that maternal health is influenced by medical, social, economic, and cultural factors.

In low-resource settings, achieving safe motherhood is often hindered by inadequate health infrastructure, shortage of trained healthcare personnel, limited availability of essential drugs and equipment, and sociocultural barriers that restrict women's access to care. Nurses, by virtue of their close interaction with women and communities, are uniquely positioned to address these challenges through context-specific, culturally sensitive, and cost-effective strategies.

Burden of Maternal Mortality in Low-Resource Settings

Maternal mortality remains alarmingly high in low-resource settings, with the majority of deaths resulting from direct obstetric causes such as hemorrhage, hypertensive disorders, sepsis, obstructed labor, and unsafe abortion. Indirect causes, including anemia, malnutrition, infections, and pre-existing medical conditions, further compound the risk. These deaths are often exacerbated by delays in seeking care, reaching healthcare facilities, and receiving appropriate treatment—commonly referred to as the "three delays model."

Nurses play a vital role in mitigating these delays by providing early identification of risk factors, timely referral, and continuous monitoring throughout pregnancy and childbirth. Their ability to deliver preventive, promotive, and curative services is central to reducing maternal mortality and improving pregnancy outcomes.

Nursing Strategies in Antenatal Care

Antenatal care (ANC) is a cornerstone of safe motherhood, offering an opportunity to identify and manage risks before they escalate into life-threatening complications. In low-resource settings, nurses often lead ANC services and are responsible for ensuring comprehensive and regular follow-up.

Nursing strategies in antenatal care focus on early registration of pregnancy, risk assessment, and individualized care planning. Nurses conduct thorough assessments to identify high-risk conditions such as anemia, hypertension, diabetes, malnutrition, and infections. Through routine screening and monitoring, they play a critical role in preventing complications like pre-eclampsia, preterm birth, and intrauterine growth restriction.

Health education is an integral component of antenatal nursing care. Nurses educate women and their families about nutrition, personal hygiene, danger signs during pregnancy, birth preparedness, and the importance of skilled birth attendance. In low-resource settings, where misconceptions and traditional beliefs may influence health-seeking behavior, nurses act as trusted educators, empowering women to make informed decisions about their care.

Nursing Interventions During Intranatal Care

Safe intranatal care is essential for preventing maternal and neonatal complications during labor and delivery. In many low-resource settings, nurses and midwives serve as skilled birth attendants, providing continuous support and clinical care during childbirth.

Nursing strategies during the intranatal period emphasize the use of evidence-based practices to ensure safe and respectful childbirth. Nurses monitor labor progress using tools such as the partograph, enabling early detection of prolonged or obstructed labor. They maintain strict aseptic techniques to prevent infections and provide appropriate pain management and emotional support to laboring women.

Active management of the third stage of labor is a key nursing intervention to prevent postpartum hemorrhage, one of the leading causes of maternal death. Nurses administer uterotonic drugs, assess uterine tone, and monitor blood loss to ensure timely intervention. In settings with limited access to emergency obstetric care, the competence and vigilance of nurses can mean the difference between life and death.

Postnatal Nursing Strategies for Maternal Safety

The postnatal period is a critical yet often neglected phase of maternal care, particularly in low-resource settings. Many maternal deaths occur within the first 48 hours after delivery, underscoring the importance of skilled postnatal care.

Nurses play a vital role in monitoring mothers for complications such as postpartum hemorrhage, infection, hypertensive disorders, and thromboembolic events. Through regular assessments and prompt management, they help prevent the progression of minor issues into severe conditions.

Postnatal nursing care also includes support for breastfeeding, newborn care education, and counseling on family planning. Nurses promote early initiation of breastfeeding and exclusive breastfeeding practices, which benefit both maternal and neonatal health. By addressing

physical, emotional, and psychological needs, nurses contribute to a holistic approach to safe motherhood during the postpartum period.

Community-Based Nursing Strategies

Community-based nursing interventions are particularly important in low-resource settings, where geographic, financial, and cultural barriers limit access to facility-based care. Community health nurses and midwives extend maternal health services beyond health facilities, reaching women in their homes and communities.

Home visits during pregnancy and the postpartum period allow nurses to identify risks, reinforce health education, and provide follow-up care. Nurses also engage with community leaders, traditional birth attendants, and women's groups to promote positive health behaviors and encourage timely utilization of maternal health services.

Task-shifting and task-sharing strategies have emerged as effective approaches in resource-constrained settings. Nurses are often trained to perform expanded roles, such as administering life-saving medications, managing uncomplicated deliveries, and initiating referrals for obstetric emergencies. These strategies enhance service coverage and strengthen health system resilience.

Respectful Maternity Care and Ethical Considerations

Respectful maternity care is a fundamental aspect of safe motherhood and a key nursing responsibility. In low-resource settings, women may experience neglect, discrimination, or abuse during childbirth, which can deter them from seeking care in the future.

Nurses play a critical role in upholding dignity, privacy, and informed consent during maternal care. By fostering a compassionate and respectful environment, nurses help build trust between women and the healthcare system. Ethical nursing practice also involves advocating for women's rights, addressing gender inequities, and ensuring equitable access to quality care regardless of socioeconomic status.

Challenges Faced by Nurses in Low-Resource Settings

Despite their central role, nurses in low-resource settings face numerous challenges that hinder the delivery of safe motherhood services. These include inadequate staffing, heavy workloads, limited access to training, shortage of essential supplies, and poor working conditions. Emotional burnout and lack of professional recognition further affect nurse morale and performance.

Addressing these challenges requires systemic interventions, including investment in nursing education, supportive supervision, fair remuneration, and policy frameworks that recognize and strengthen the role of nurses in maternal health.

Innovations and Future Directions

Innovative approaches are increasingly being adopted to enhance nursing strategies for safe motherhood in low-resource settings. The use of mobile health technologies, teleconsultation, and digital decision-support tools has shown promise in improving communication, data collection, and clinical decision-making.

Strengthening interprofessional collaboration and integrating maternal health services with broader primary healthcare initiatives can further enhance outcomes. Future efforts should focus on empowering nurses through continuous professional development, leadership training, and research engagement to sustain improvements in maternal health.

Conclusion

Promoting safe motherhood in low-resource settings is a complex but achievable goal, with nurses playing a central and transformative role. Through comprehensive antenatal, intranatal, postnatal, and community-based strategies, nurses address the multifaceted determinants of maternal health and work tirelessly to reduce preventable maternal morbidity and mortality. Strengthening nursing capacity, ensuring supportive work environments, and fostering respectful maternity care are essential for advancing safe motherhood initiatives. By investing in nursing strategies and recognizing the critical contribution of nurses, health systems can move closer to ensuring that every woman experiences pregnancy and childbirth safely, regardless of where she lives.

Bibliography

1. World Health Organization. *Trends in Maternal Mortality: 2000 to 2020*. WHO; 2023.
2. United Nations Population Fund. *State of the World's Midwifery*. UNFPA; 2021.

3. Lawn JE, Kinney M, Black RE, et al. Newborn survival: a multi-country analysis of a decade of change. *Health Policy and Planning*. 2012;27(3):iii6–iii28.

4. Campbell OM, Graham WJ. Strategies for reducing maternal mortality: getting on with what works. *The Lancet*. 2006;368(9543):1284–1299.

5. World Health Organization. *WHO Recommendations on Antenatal Care for a Positive Pregnancy Experience*. WHO; 2016.

6. Renfrew MJ, McFadden A, Bastos MH, et al. Midwifery and quality care: findings from a new evidence-informed framework. *The Lancet*. 2014;384(9948):1129–1145.

7. Filby A, McConville F, Portela A. What prevents quality midwifery care? A systematic mapping of barriers in low- and middle-income countries. *PLOS ONE*. 2016;11(5):e0153391.

8. Bohren MA, Vogel JP, Hunter EC, et al. The mistreatment of women during childbirth in health facilities globally. *PLOS Medicine*. 2015;12(6):e1001847.

9. World Health Organization. *Strengthening Quality Midwifery Education for Universal Health Coverage*. WHO; 2019.

10. Homer CSE, Friberg IK, Dias MAB, et al. The projected effect of scaling up midwifery. *The Lancet*. 2014;384(9948):1146–1157.