

A faint, light-colored illustration in the background shows a silhouette of a woman standing and holding a large, circular arrangement of many smaller human figures. The figures are in various poses, some with arms raised, suggesting a group or community. The woman's silhouette is centered at the bottom, and the circle of figures is positioned above her, filling most of the upper half of the slide.

Obstetric Violence

Disrespect and Abuse in Childbirth

Simone Snyder
Rutgers University
VAWC Consortium



“They tell you to spread your legs the way you did when you got pregnant.”

“Everything that came out of her mouth was about the color of my skin.”

“They injected me without explaining.”

“A nurse who was helping me told me that I should push. At that moment I couldn't and I cried out. The nurse slapped me and I felt ashamed.”

“They put me up in the stirrups and everything and I kept trying to close my legs, and they kept opening my legs up, and they're touching me and wiping me.”

“The doctor would not get her fingers out of my vagina even when directly told.”

“At the medical school a woman attendant was yelling at the mother *"Shut your mouth! Stop yelling and push. You knew what you were doing when you had sex, now you see the result and you're going to cry?"* We thought she was our idol because she was really in control of the situation.”



What is Obstetric Violence?

Occurs at the intersections of institutional violence and violence against women

Happens during pregnancy, labor and postpartum

Happens in public and private practice

Locally and globally

- Physical abuse or verbal abuse
- Non-consented care
- Non-confidential care
- Non-dignified care
- Abandonment
- Detention in facilities
- Discrimination based on race, ethnicity, economic status, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity

Factors that contribute:

- Normalization of disrespect and abuse during childbirth
- Lack of community engagement and oversight
- Financial barriers
- Lack of women's autonomy and empowerment.



Obstetric Violence recognized as a legal term in Venezuela 2007

Similar definitions were introduced in Argentina and certain Mexican states following the Venezuelan model

“The appropriation of the body and reproductive processes of women by health personnel, which is expressed as dehumanized treatment, an abuse of medication, and to convert the natural processes into pathological ones, bringing with it loss of autonomy and the ability to decide freely about their bodies and sexuality, negatively impacting the quality of life of women.”

Human Rights

In 2014, the World Health Organization addressed the issue in a statement on mistreatment during childbirth, the statement was endorsed by more than 90 international, civil society, and health professional organizations.

In 2015, the UN and other human rights experts issued a joint statement calling on states to address acts of obstetric and institutional violence.

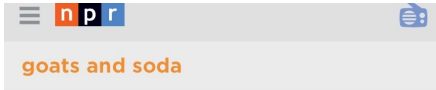
Respectful maternity care is a universal human right that is due to every childbearing woman/person in every health system around the world.



Rights Violations

- Right to informed consent
- Right to refuse medical treatment
- Right to health
- Right to equal treatment
- Right to privacy
- Right to life
- Right to bodily autonomy
- Right to live free from violence

Who is Impacted?



WOMEN & GIRLS

Kenyan Woman Abused By Nurses During Childbirth Wins Landmark Case

April 10, 2018 · 1:48 PM ET

SUSAN BRINK



Kenya 20% experienced some form of disrespect and abuse during childbirth (Abuya, et al., 2015)

More than half of U.S. Birth Workers had witnessed a physician engage in a procedure against a woman's will (Diaz-Tello, 2016)

Serena Williams: 'Doctors Aren't Listening' So Black Women Are Dying

"Unfortunately a lot of African-Americans and black people don't have the same experience that I've had."

By Carly Ledbetter



Tanzania 15% of women immediately postpartum and 70% in a community follow up experienced at least one instance of disrespect and abuse during childbirth (Sando et al., 2016)



Adolescents, unmarried women, women of low-socioeconomic status, women from ethnic or sexual minorities, women of color, migrant women, undocumented women, women living with HIV are particularly likely to experience disrespectful and abusive treatment (WHO, 2015)



What are the Consequences?

Poor outcomes for mothers and babies

Mother-baby bonding impacted

Impact maternal mental health i.e. depression and anxiety

Distrust in the medical system

Triggering for survivors of sexual assault

Birth Trauma and PTSD

- 35% of women experienced some degree of PTSD symptoms postpartum
- 26% of obstetric nurses met all diagnostic criteria for PTSD due to exposure to patients who were traumatized (Kitzinger, 2006; Fernandez, 2013; Reed et al., 2017)



Maternal Mortality

Issues of gender equity and gender-based violence are at the core of maternity care – the notion of “safe motherhood” must be expanded beyond the prevention of morbidity or mortality to encompass respect for women’s basic human rights.

(White Ribbon Alliance)

Disrespect and abuse of women during maternity care are problems that have been obscured by a “veil of silence,” and they can significantly impact women’s willingness to seek out life-saving maternity care. In fact, disrespect and abuse in facilities are among the biggest barriers to women seeking maternal health services.

(Bowser and Hill, 2010)

"Women are not dying because of untreatable diseases. They are dying because societies have yet to make the decision that their lives are worth saving. We have not yet valued women's lives and health highly enough."

-Professor Mahmoud Fathalla



Implications for Social Work

Micro

- Understand the issue - scope, consequences, treatment
- Give clients opportunity to talk about experience
- Research counseling interventions and support

Macro

- Need more interdisciplinary research
- Education human rights in childbirth
- Address structural, social, and political roots of the problem
- Raise awareness and demand respectful maternity care rights
- Advocate for legislation that addresses obstetric violence and maternal mortality (i.e. NJ S3452 Maternal Mortality Review Commission)

To Learn More...

Safe Motherhood is more than the prevention of death and disability... It is respect for every woman's humanity, feelings, choices, and preferences.

RESPECTFUL MATERNITY CARE: THE UNIVERSAL RIGHTS OF CHILDBEARING WOMEN



- 1. BE FREE FROM HARM AND ILL TREATMENT**
NO ONE CAN PHYSICALLY ABUSE YOU
- 2. INFORMATION, INFORMED CONSENT AND REFUSAL, AND RESPECT FOR HER CHOICES AND PREFERENCES, INCLUDING COMPANIONSHIP DURING MATERNITY CARE**
NO ONE CAN FORCE YOU OR DO THINGS TO YOU WITHOUT YOUR KNOWLEDGE AND CONSENT
- 3. PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY**
NO ONE CAN EXPOSE YOU OR YOUR PERSONAL INFORMATION
- 4. BE TREATED WITH DIGNITY AND RESPECT**
NO ONE CAN HUMILIATE OR VERBALLY ABUSE YOU
- 5. EQUALITY, FREEDOM FROM DISCRIMINATION, AND EQUITABLE CARE**
NO ONE CAN DISCRIMINATE BECAUSE OF SOMETHING THEY DO NOT LIKE ABOUT YOU
- 6. HEALTHCARE AND TO THE HIGHEST ATTAINABLE LEVEL OF HEALTH**
NO ONE CAN PREVENT YOU FROM GETTING THE MATERNITY CARE YOU NEED
- 7. LIBERTY, AUTONOMY, SELF-DETERMINATION, AND FREEDOM FROM COERCION**
NO ONE CAN DETAIN YOU OR YOUR BABY WITHOUT LEGAL AUTHORITY

Disrespect and abuse during maternity care are a violation of women's basic human rights.



For more information visit:
www.whiteribbonalliance.org/respectfulcare

All rights are grounded in established international instruments: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; the Declaration of the Elimination of Violence Against Women; the Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on preventable maternal mortality and morbidity and human rights; and the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. Existing National Instruments are also referenced if they make specific mention of childbearing women.


Amnesty International – Obstetric Violence Video

White Ribbon Alliance – Break the Silence

Human Rights in Childbirth

Women and Childbirth #bastatacere

First National Survey on Obstetric Violence Doxa-OVOItalia*
Representing 5 million maternity service users in the last 14 years (2003-2017)



99% Gave birth in a hospital
For a second pregnancy:
14% would not choose the same facility again
14% not sure if they would choose the same facility again

32% Birth by C-section
15% emergency
14% scheduled for medical reasons
3% personal choice

Episiotomy 54%

Episiotomy "by deceit" for 1,6 million women

61% declare they did not give their informed consent
15% consider it as a genital mutilation
13% experienced it as a betrayal

21% of mothers in Italy declare they suffered obstetric violence while giving birth \approx 1 million women in 14 years

41% 4 out of 10 women declare they were subjected to practices that violated their dignity and psychophysical integrity

33% of mothers felt inadequately assisted (they felt excluded)

6% of women did not want any more children
20,000 children not born every year

*Opinion survey (424 interviewees) conducted by Doxa in collaboration with Obstetric Violence Observatory Italy (OVOItalia), financed by La Gioconda Magica and GioLupo. Project coordinators Alessandra Battisti and Elena Skoko.

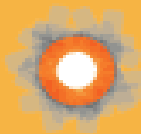
Support the initiative!
www.lagocciamagica.it

Osservatorio sulla
Violenza Ostetrica
Italia

#bastatacere
mothers have voice

Thank You! Questions?

Respectful maternity care
is a human right.



Maternal Health
Task Force

END BIRTH VIOLENCE, COERCION,
TRAUMA, DISRESPECT & VIOLATIONS
OF OUR HUMAN RIGHTS

#METOOBIRTH

#METOO

bit.ly/MeTooBirth

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