

## A Realist Review of Interventions Targeting Maternal Health in Low- and Middle-income Countries

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**Abstract :** Background. Maternal mortality is disproportionately higher in low- and middle- income countries (LMICs) compared to other parts of the world. At the current pace of progress, the Sustainable Development Goals for maternal mortality rate will not be achieved by 2030. A variety of factors influence the increased risk of maternal complications in LMICs. These are exacerbated by socio-economic and political factors, including poverty, illiteracy, and gender inequality. This paper aims to use realist synthesis to identify the contexts, mechanisms, and outcomes (CMOs) of maternal health interventions conducted in LMICs to inform evidence-based practice for future maternal health interventions. Methods. In May 2022, we searched four electronic databases for systematic reviews of maternal health interventions in LMICs published in the last five years. We used open and axial coding of CMOs to develop an explanatory framework for intervention effectiveness. Results. After eligibility screening and full-text analysis, 44 papers were included. The intervention strategies and measured outcomes varied within reviews. Healthcare system level contextual factors were the most frequently reported, and infrastructural capacity was the most reported context. The most prevalent mechanism was increased knowledge and awareness. Discussion. Health system infrastructure must be considered in interventions to ensure effective implementation and sustainability. Healthcare-seeking behaviours are embedded within social and cultural norms, environmental conditions, family influences, and provider attitudes. Therefore, effective engagement with communities and families is important to create new norms surrounding pregnancy and delivery. Future research should explore community mobilisation and involvement to enable tailored interventions with optimal contextual fit.

**Keywords :** maternal mortality, service delivery and organisation, realist synthesis, sustainable development goals, overview of reviews

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