

Support Provided by Midwives to Women during Labour in a Public Hospital, Limpopo Province, South Africa: A Participant Observation Study

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Abstract : Background: Support during labour increase women's chances of having positive childbirth experiences as well as childbirth outcomes. The purpose of this study was to determine the support provided by midwives to women during labour at the public hospital in Limpopo Province. The study was conducted at the Tertiary hospital in Limpopo Province. Methods: A qualitative, participant observation approach was used. Population consisted of all women that were admitted to deliver their babies and the midwives who provided midwifery care in the obstetric unit of one tertiary public hospital in Limpopo Province. Non-probability, purposive and convenience sampling were used to sample 24 women and 12 midwives. Data were collected through participant observations which included unstructured conversations with the use of observational guide, field notes of events and conversations that occurred when women interact with midwives were recorded verbatim and a Visual Analog Scale to complement the observations. Data was analysed qualitatively but were presented in the tables and bar graphs. Results: Five themes emerged as support provided by midwives during labour, namely; communication between women and midwives, informational support, emotional support activities, interpretation of the experienced labour pain and supportive care activities during labour. Conclusion: The communication was occurring when the midwife was rendering midwifery care and very limited for empowering. The information sharing focused on the assistive actions rather than on the activities that would promote mothers' participation. The emotional support activities indicated lack of respect and disregard cultural preferences and this contributed to inability to exercise choices in decision-making. The study recommended the implementation of Batho Pele principles in order to provide woman-centred care during labour.

Keywords : communication between women and midwives, labour pains, informational and emotional support, physical comforting measures

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