

# Respectful Maternity Care: A Holistic Approach

Usha Sharma\*

**“In India we have great respect for Mothers”**



**Do we show the same respect for “mother to be” during pregnancy and childbirth?**

## Introduction

In every country and community worldwide, pregnancy and childbirth are momentous events in the lives of women and families and represent a time of intense vulnerability. The concept of “safe motherhood” is usually restricted to physical safety, but childbearing is also an important rite of passage, with deep personal and cultural significance for a woman and her family.

Holistic approach in medicine means treatment of the whole person taking into account mental and social factors, rather than just the symptoms of a disease. In a pregnant patient holistic approach to RMC entails good antenatal, intrapartum and postpartum care of the mother and the baby. This approach also includes care of the emotions and psychological needs of the pregnant woman. It also includes involving the family and the society.

\*President ISOPARB [2020-22]

Corresponding author : Usha Sharma

Every woman around the world has a right to receive respectful maternity care. In November 2000, the International Conference on the Humanization of Childbirth was held in Brazil, largely as a response to the trend of medicalized birth, exemplified by the global cesarean section epidemic, as well as growing concerns over obstetric violence. Advocates emphasized the need to humanize birth, taking a more holistic approach.

<https://www.mhtf.org/topics/respectful-maternity-care/maternalhealthtaskforce>

## History

The journey toward respectful maternity care began in the late 1940s with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the 1990’s, the United Nations issued the “Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women” and a movement gained force in Latin America which was termed “humanization” of childbirth. Growing awareness of often unaddressed issues of emotional, physical and psychological harm to women during facility-based childbirth required greater consideration.

In 2011, White Ribbon Alliance published the Respectful Maternity Care Charter: The Universal Rights of Childbearing Women, a document utilized in many countries as an advocacy and program tool. The World Health Organization released a statement in 2014 reasserting the fundamental human rights of women in childbirth. The field of respectful care has continued to grow with increased focus, as evidenced by numerous studies and publications.

**White Ribbon Alliance | October 2011**  
**World Health Organization | October 2014**

## Obstetric Violence

The concept of “obstetric violence” gained momentum in the global maternal health community during the childbirth activism movement in Latin America in the 1990s.

In 2007, Venezuela formally defined “obstetric violence” as the appropriation of women’s body and reproductive processes by health personnel, which is expressed by a dehumanizing treatment, an abuse of medicalization and pathologization of natural processes, resulting in a loss of autonomy and ability to decide freely about their bodies and sexuality, negatively impacting their quality of life.

<https://www.mhtf.org/topics/respectful-maternity-care/>

## Rights of Childbearing Woman

Browner & Hill in 2010 has described the 7 rights of childbearing woman as universal human right admitted to any health facility.

### Corresponding Rights

- Freedom from harm and ill treatment
- Right to information, informed consent and refusal, and respect for choices and preferences, including companionship during maternity care
- Confidentiality, privacy
- Dignity, respect
- Equality, freedom from discrimination, equitable care
- Right to timely healthcare and to the highest attainable level of health
- Liberty, autonomy, self-determination, and freedom from coercion

## Disrespect And Abuse (D&A) – Global Scenario

Disrespect and abuse (D&A), a concept closely related to obstetric violence, has been documented in many different countries across the globe.

In a 2010 landscape analysis, Bowser and Hill described 7 categories of disrespectful and abusive care during childbirth:

### Category of Disrespect and Abuse

1. Physical Abuse

2. Non-consented care
3. Non-confidential care
4. Non-dignified care (including verbal abuse)
5. Discrimination based on specific attributes
6. Abandonment or denial of care
7. Detention in facilities

**Bowser, D., and K. Hill. 2010. Exploring Evidence for Disrespect and Abuse in Facility-based Childbirth: Report of a Landscape Analysis**

**A 2015 systematic review updated this framework to include:**

1. Physical abuse
2. Sexual abuse
3. Verbal abuse
4. Stigma and discrimination
5. Failure to meet professional standards of care
6. Poor rapport between women and providers
7. Health system conditions and constraints

<https://www.mhtf.org/topics/respectful-maternity-care/>

## Disrespect And Abuse (D&A) – Indian Scenario

The highest reported forms of ill-treatment were non consent, verbal abuse, threats, physical abuse, and discrimination. Sociocultural and environmental factors were identified as determinants of ill-treatment. The analysis also identified the need to achieve comparability across settings by developing tools, consistent methodologies, and standardized definitions.

In conclusion, there is a nation-wide need to focus on the quality of care delivered at the health facilities.

This can be achieved by development of targeted interventions and implementation of policies and programs that will eliminate disrespect and ensure respectful maternity care at all settings.

The high prevalence of disrespectful maternity care indicates an urgent need to improve maternity care in India by making it more respectful, dignified, and women-centered. Interventions, policies, and programs should be implemented that will protect the fundamental rights of women.

J Postgrad Med. 2020 Jul-Sep; 66(3): 133–140.

## **International childbirth initiative [ICI] - 2018**

### **Described 12 steps to safe & respectful Mother Baby-Family Maternity Care**

- Step 1: Treat every woman and newborn with compassion, respect and dignity
- Step 2: Respect every woman's right to access and receive non-discriminatory and free or at least affordable care
- Step 3: Routinely provide Mother Baby-Family maternity care.
- Step 4: Acknowledge the mother's right to continuous support during labour and birth
- Step 5: Offer non-pharmacological comfort and pain relief measures during labour
- Step 6: Provide evidence-based practices beneficial for the MotherBaby-Family
- Step 7: Avoid potentially harmful procedures and practices that have insufficient evidence of benefit outweighing risk for routine or frequent use
- Step 8: Implement measures that enhance wellness and prevent illness
- Step 9: Provide appropriate obstetric, neonatal, and emergency treatment
- Step 10: Have a supportive human resource policy
- Step 11: Provide a continuum of collaborative care
- Step 12: Promote breastfeeding and skin-to-skin contact,

### **Respectful Maternity Care Promotes**

- Respect for beliefs, traditions and culture
- Empowerment of the woman and her family to become active participants in health care
- Continuous support during labor
- Choice of companion during labor and birth
- The right to information and privacy
- Freedom of movement during labor
- Respect for beliefs, traditions and culture
- Empowerment of the woman and her family to become active participants in health care
- Continuous support during labor
- Choice of companion during labor and birth
- The right to information and privacy
- Freedom of movement during labor

## **Benefits of Holistic Therapy in Pregnancy**

Pregnancy should be a wonderful and a magical time, with so much to look forward to. However, there's a lot of pressure on the changing body, so it can also be an uncomfortable, stressful or even painful time.

Along with sensible exercise and healthy eating there are several holistic therapies which can have many benefits throughout pregnancy – and beyond Yoga, Pregnancy Massage, Bowen and Reflexology can all be valuable.

### **Measures to prevent and eliminate disrespect and abuse during facility-based childbirth**

- Greater support from governments and development partners for research and action on disrespect and abuse
- Initiate, support and sustain programs designed to improve the quality of maternal health care, with a strong focus on respectful care as an essential component of quality care
- Emphasizing the rights of women to dignified, respectful health care throughout pregnancy and childbirth
- Generating data related to respectful and disrespectful care practices, systems of accountability and meaningful professional support are required
- Involve all stakeholders, including women, in efforts to improve quality of care and eliminate disrespectful and abusive practices

## **Take Home Message**

A holistic approach considers all aspect of your family life to best prepare you for pregnancy, child birth and parenting.

Holistic pregnancy care is personalized for each individual.

Respectful Maternity Care (RMC) will be incomplete without holistic approach.

The Health Care Providers should aim for Respectful Maternity Care with holistic approach for every women globally.

## REFERENCE

<https://www.mhtf.org/topics/respectful-maternity-care/maternalhealthtaskforce>

White Ribbon Alliance | October 2011

World Health Organization | October 2014

<https://www.mhtf.org/topics/respectful-maternity-care/>

Bowser, D., and K. Hill. 2010. Exploring Evidence for Disrespect and Abuse in Facility-based Childbirth: Report of a Landscape Analysis

<https://www.mhtf.org/topics/respectful-maternity-care/>

J Postgrad Med. 2020 Jul-Sep; 66(3): 133–140.

**CALL FOR PAPERS**

**From Pan India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Asia Pacific Region,  
United Kingdom & Overseas**

- High Quality Research Papers/ Original Articles
- Review Articles
- Commentaries
- Letters to Editor
- Observational Studies covering General Obstetrics, Gynecology, Anesthesiology, Internal Medicine, Perinatology, Neonatology & Reproductive Biology
- Papers are invited from all the disciplines which have relevance to practice and policy
- Case reports of importance and papers on basic science are also accepted with these subjects.