



Midwives Speaking Out on COVID-19: The International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) Global Survey published in scientific journal PLOS ONE

[Midwives speaking out on COVID-19: The International Confederation of Midwives Global Survey](#), a study coordinated by the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM), has been peer-reviewed and published in the scientific journal [PLOS ONE](#). The paper is now open-access and explores the impact of the pandemic through the experiences of 101 midwifery organisations from around the world. The representation of midwives' experiences in scientific publications is key in ensuring midwives' voices are heard, acknowledged and considered in health policy.

All the regions and sub-regions where ICM has member organisations responded. The study identified the sheer scale of many of the global issues facing midwives and women from the start of the pandemic until midway through 2021.

The common themes that emerged from the study included a lack of supply of personal protective equipment (PPE), the move to online and telephone consultations, the uncertainty of where to give birth in the context of fear of infection, and maternity facilities becoming COVID-19 facilities. Many associations reported the loss of women's autonomy in choosing their place of birth and of having a chosen support person with them during birth and postnatally. In addition, there appeared to be an alarming increase in violence against women.

These factors translate to a denial of human rights for childbearing women in many instances. Midwives described the reality of burnout, exhaustion, and declining mental health in relation to COVID-19. The survey showed that all these issues are impacting the midwifery workforce, and exist across all regions, globally. They are widespread and are not limited to high- or low-income countries. In many countries midwives have been working without pay and in risk high-risk situations that threaten their own life as well as those of colleagues and family members. In addition to this the education of midwives has been severely disrupted, in some places closing altogether.

Conclusive Recommendations from the Midwives Speaking out on COVID-19 Survey

The paper concludes with recommendations, including:

- Midwives must be visible to ministries of health and governments.
- Midwife-led continuity of care must be prioritised, with greater support provided for community-based midwifery care either in homes or in the community in midwife led birth centres.
- Women must continue to have access to sexual and reproductive health services. (Lack of access has long-term, wide-ranging negative implications for individuals and society and midwives play a central role in upholding and protecting women's rights.)
- Personal protective equipment (PPE) and testing for COVID-19 must be available to ensure midwives and birth centres are properly equipped to deliver quality care.
- Policy makers should ensure midwife involvement and leadership in determining health policy and effective COVID-19 responses, recognising that midwives are the most appropriate professionals to inform the government about effective organisation of

midwifery services, and of their own needs and those of the women and new-borns they care for.

- Midwives should not be deployed to areas outside of their scope of practice, unless imperative. Midwifery care and nursing care are not interchangeable; childbearing women must have a qualified midwifery workforce to provide respectful, competent, and safe maternity care.
- Midwives must have access to evidence-based guidance, training, and other COVID-19 resources.

[This paper is freely available on the PLOS ONE website.](#)

Organisational Quotes

Dr. Sally Pairman, Chief Executive of the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) said:

“The findings of this survey underscore what midwives have been saying since long before COVID-19: when we are left out of decision-making, our needs and the needs of the women and new-borns we care for are deprioritised and ignored. ICM, in solidarity with its more than 140 midwives' association across every region in the world, calls on governments and their ministries of health to action the recommendations in this report in order to ensure responsive and sustainable health systems that can withstand the next manmade crises. The peer-reviewed process this report has now undergone solidifies our resolve to circulating these important findings and rallying more decision-makers behind the cost-saving, life-promoting potential of midwives.”

About ICM

The International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) supports, represents and works to strengthen professional associations of midwives throughout the world. There are currently 140 Members Associations, representing 119 countries across every continent. ICM is organised in six regions:

- Africa (Anglophone and Francophone)
- Americas (North America & Caribbean and Latin America)
- Western Pacific
- Eastern Mediterranean
- South East Asia
- Europe (Northern, Central and Southern)

Together these associations represent over 1 million midwives globally.

ICM is an accredited non-governmental organisation representing midwives and midwifery to organisations worldwide to achieve common goals in the care of mothers and newborns. ICM works closely with the WHO, UNFPA and other UN Agencies; global professional health care organisations including the International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO), the International Pediatric Association (IPA), the International Council of Nurses (ICN), non-governmental organisations; bilateral and civil society groups.

