Multilingual communication in midwifery care

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Abstract:

Language discordance, i.e., when the midwife does not speak the same language as the childbearing person, can trigger the requirement for language support, hence multilingual communication practices (MCP). Midwives may adopt several multilingual practices or strategies to provide language support for these situations. To further add to the complexity of the situation, current language support seems to operate in a suboptimal way with widespread variations in how patients can access interpreters (NHS, 2015, 2018) as well as issues of quality and trust (Binder et al., 2012). Henceforth, this research hopes to address this potentially huge societal impact in a qualitative manner.

Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) was the framework used to capture the voices of both midwives (29 UHSussex midwives) and childbearing women (15 service users who experienced language discordant midwifery care during 2018-2021) through semi-structured interviews. An accredited interpreter was employed for 12 interviews with the service user participants (Arabic (6), Bengali (2), Polish (2) and Turkish (2)). The other three service user interviews were with a researcher (here: a midwife) who is positioned within the context of the research (here: UHSussex NHS Maternity Trust) and simultaneously examines this context (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, 2017). They spoke in Lao (1) and Thai (2) to provide unhindered and full expression in their mother tongue. Through this study an abstract theory was derived from the iterative data called MCP at crucial moments. Here, key issues around midwifery care were discovered such as rapport building and non-verbal communication strategies. CGT is helpful in recovering experiences of silences or marginalised voices especially in language support that may be intricately laced into other social constructs such as race and culture (Signh & Estefan, 2018). The two main stakeholders gave their perspectives on language discordance and midwifery care, which may have implications on future practice.

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