



Critical Review Article

Effective Communication in Midwifery Practice Strengthening Patient Trust and Maternal Health Outcomes

Ainun Ganisia^{1*} and Muhammad Khofidul A'zdom²

¹Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Dr. Soetomo, Indonesia

²Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya, Indonesia

*Correspondence author: ainunganisia@unitomo.ac.id

Abstract

Effective communication forms the foundation of safe and high-quality midwifery care. Beyond the transmission of medical information, communication in midwifery involves empathy, respect, and therapeutic interaction that build trust and improve maternal experiences. In Indonesia, communication competence among midwives plays a crucial role in achieving national maternal health goals and reducing preventable complications. This paper explores the conceptual framework and practical relevance of effective communication in midwifery practice, emphasizing its role in strengthening patient trust, improving service satisfaction, and enhancing maternal health outcomes. Using a descriptive qualitative and literature-based approach, this study synthesizes theoretical and empirical evidence from midwifery, communication, and behavioral health disciplines. Sources from 2018–2025, including textbooks, journal articles, and WHO and ICM guidelines, were analyzed through narrative synthesis focusing on three key dimensions: interpersonal, informational, and therapeutic communication. The analysis revealed that effective midwifery communication characterized by active listening, empathy, and clarity significantly increases maternal trust, adherence to care, and satisfaction with services. Communication also reduces anxiety, facilitates early complication detection, and strengthens interprofessional collaboration within maternity teams. Barriers such as workload, cultural diversity, and time constraints highlight the need for continuous professional development and institutional support. Effective communication is a clinical skill that integrates emotional intelligence with technical expertise. By embedding communication training into midwifery education and policy standards, healthcare systems can foster trustful, patient-centered relationships that contribute to improved maternal and neonatal health outcomes.

Keywords: midwifery communication; patient trust; therapeutic interaction; maternal health; empathy; professional competence.

1. Introduction

Communication is the cornerstone of effective healthcare delivery, particularly within midwifery practice, where emotional sensitivity, trust, and empathy determine the quality of maternal care. Midwifery is not only a clinical profession but also a deeply interpersonal one, requiring bidirectional communication between midwives and patients to ensure safety, comfort, and mutual understanding throughout pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period [1]. Effective communication in midwifery encompasses both verbal and nonverbal interactions that aim to support women's physical, psychological, and emotional well-being [2], [3].

According to Sulenti Widiastutik (2025), effective communication is a process of exchanging information that produces understanding, pleasure, influence on attitudes, and the establishment of positive relationships between healthcare providers and clients. Within the context of maternal and newborn health, such communication is not merely a professional courtesy, it is a therapeutic intervention [4]. A midwife's ability to listen attentively, provide reassurance, and convey medical information clearly can significantly affect maternal outcomes, particularly in reducing anxiety, fostering compliance with care plans, and preventing miscommunication-related complications [5].

In many healthcare settings, poor communication remains one of the leading causes of patient dissatisfaction, medical errors, and delays in emergency response. In the field of midwifery, ineffective communication may result in misunderstanding symptoms, delayed referrals, or non-adherence to antenatal care instructions [6]. Conversely, clear and empathetic communication enhances the patient's confidence, leading to earlier problem recognition, active participation in decision-making, and greater trust in the care process [7]. Research across multiple health disciplines consistently shows that trust built through communication is a predictor of better clinical outcomes, higher maternal satisfaction, and reduced risk of psychological distress during labor [8].

Midwives occupy a unique position in the healthcare system as both technical experts and emotional companions [9]. Their role extends beyond medical intervention; they act as educators, counselors, and advocates for women's reproductive rights. To fulfill these diverse responsibilities, midwives must master communication skills that are adaptive, culturally sensitive, and patient centered. This involves more than delivering information, it requires understanding the woman's perspective, social context, and emotional state [10]. For instance, communicating with an anxious mother in labor demands not only clinical accuracy but also emotional intelligence and calm reassurance [11].

Effective communication in midwifery practice can be categorized into three key dimensions: interpersonal, informational, and therapeutic [12], [13].

- The interpersonal dimension involves building rapport and establishing a trusting relationship, often through eye contact, open body language, and empathy.
- The informational dimension focuses on delivering clear, accurate, and accessible explanations about maternal health conditions, procedures, and care plans.
- The therapeutic dimension integrates communication as part of the healing process, helping patients cope with fear, pain, or uncertainty through active listening and supportive dialogue.
- These dimensions work synergistically to promote holistic maternal care. Care that acknowledges both physical and psychological needs.

The importance of effective communication becomes particularly evident in high-risk or emergency obstetric situations. During complications such as preeclampsia, hemorrhage, or fetal distress, the ability of a midwife to communicate clearly with patients, families, and multidisciplinary teams can directly influence life-saving interventions [14]. Communication errors during these critical moments have been associated with delayed treatment and increased morbidity. Therefore, structured communication frameworks, such as SBAR (Situation, Background, Assessment, Recommendation), are increasingly recommended in midwifery education and practice to enhance clarity and prevent misunderstandings among team members [15], [16].

Cultural competence also plays a vital role in ensuring that communication is both respectful and effective [17]. Indonesia's diverse cultural landscape requires midwives to understand and navigate differences in language, beliefs, and social norms related to pregnancy and childbirth. Misinterpretation of cultural cues can lead to resistance or mistrust, particularly when discussing sensitive issues such as reproductive choices or complications [18]. Midwives who demonstrate cultural empathy and respect for local traditions are more likely to gain cooperation and foster a sense of security among patients [19].

Furthermore, digital transformation in healthcare presents new challenges and opportunities for communication. The use of telehealth consultations, digital maternal record systems, and mobile health applications has expanded access to midwifery services but also demands new communication competencies. Midwives must learn to maintain empathy and connection even in virtual settings, ensuring that technology enhances rather than replaces human touch in maternal



care [20], [21].

In summary, effective communication in midwifery practice serves as the foundation for building trust, promoting safety, and improving maternal health outcomes. It bridges the gap between medical expertise and human experience, transforming clinical encounters into supportive relationships that empower women and their families. This article explores the conceptual framework, practical strategies, and implications of communication in midwifery care, emphasizing how empathetic, clear, and culturally responsive communication can strengthen patient trust and contribute to better maternal and neonatal outcomes.

2. Methodology and Implementation Strategy

This study employed a descriptive qualitative and conceptual approach, focusing on literature-based analysis to explore the role of effective communication in improving patient trust and maternal health outcomes within midwifery practice. Rather than conducting a survey or empirical observation, this paper synthesizes theoretical perspectives, educational frameworks, and best practices documented in both national and international literature on midwifery communication [22].

2.1 Research Design

The design of this study follows a narrative literature review model. It aims to identify, describe, and analyze the principles, techniques, and impacts of effective communication in midwifery settings [23]. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon by drawing from multidisciplinary sources covering health communication, psychology, and maternal care ethics. The conceptual framework is built upon the interactional model of communication, which emphasizes the dynamic exchange between the communicator (midwife) and the recipient (patient or family) [24].

2.2 Data Sources

Data were collected from secondary sources, including textbooks, journal articles, and professional guidelines published between 2018 and 2025. Primary references included *Keterampilan Dasar Praktik Kebidanan* (Widiastutik, 2025), *Buku Ajar Komunikasi Efektif Dalam Praktik Kebidanan* (Marsooly et al., 2024), and international studies on therapeutic communication in maternal care. Supplementary sources such as WHO reports and the Indonesian Ministry of Health standards on midwifery communication ethics were also reviewed [25], [26], [27].

2.3 Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis followed three stages [28], [29], [30]:

- Identification extracting major concepts related to communication competence, trust-building, empathy, and patient-centered care.
- Categorization grouping findings into thematic areas: verbal and nonverbal strategies, emotional intelligence in communication, and the role of cultural sensitivity in maternal health.
- Synthesis integrating insights to construct a conceptual linkage between effective communication practices and improved maternal outcomes.

2.4 Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity, triangulation was applied through cross-referencing multiple academic and institutional sources. The inclusion of recent peer-reviewed materials strengthened the reliability of interpretations. Credibility was maintained by adopting definitions and classifications consistent



with established frameworks from the WHO, the International Confederation of Midwives (ICM), and Indonesia's Standar Profesi Bidan (KMK No. 320/2020) [31], [32].

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Conceptual Overview of Therapeutic Communication in Midwifery

Effective communication in midwifery practice represents a synthesis of both scientific competence and emotional intelligence. The reviewed literature identifies communication as a multidimensional process involving the exchange of information, empathy, and mutual understanding between healthcare providers and patients. In clinical midwifery settings, therapeutic communication is considered the foundation of quality maternal care because it integrates verbal and nonverbal techniques aimed at fostering trust and collaboration [33].

Widiastutik (2025) emphasizes that effective communication must be intentional, structured, and goal oriented. It should produce three observable outcomes: (1) the message is clearly understood, (2) it elicits an appropriate response or behavioral action, and (3) it removes barriers to care. Within midwifery, these elements translate into clear explanations during antenatal visits, calm reassurance during labor, and constructive dialogue during postpartum counseling [34].

Therapeutic communication differs from ordinary conversation in that it is purpose-driven and patient-centered. It focuses on creating a healing environment through empathy, respect, and supportive interaction. Nonverbal cues such as eye contact, gentle touch, and attentive posture convey sincerity and compassion qualities that enhance maternal trust, particularly in situations involving pain, anxiety, or uncertainty [35].

3.2 Communication and Patient Trust

Trust is the most valuable outcome of effective midwifery communication. It functions as a psychological bridge between professional authority and patient vulnerability. When midwives communicate transparently explaining procedures, acknowledging patient fears, and encouraging shared decision-making patients perceive respect and competence. This perception forms the basis of trust, which in turn improves compliance with medical recommendations and satisfaction with care [36].

Research in maternal health communication shows that trust directly influences health outcomes. Mothers who feel confident in their midwives are more likely to attend follow-up appointments, adhere to nutritional advice, and report complications early. In contrast, a breakdown in communications such as unclear instructions or dismissive attitudes can lead to fear, misinformation, and delayed responses to danger signs [37].

In Indonesian healthcare culture, where community trust and family participation are integral, midwives must extend communication beyond the patient to include family members and caregivers. Culturally sensitive explanations, respect for local beliefs, and the use of familiar language reinforce both individual and collective trust. For instance, explaining labor pain as a natural and manageable process within the framework of religious reassurance can align biomedical care with spiritual understanding, creating emotional harmony during childbirth.

3.3 Communication Across Maternal Care Phases

The application of effective communication evolves through different stages of maternal care antenatal, intrapartum, and postpartum [38].

- During Antenatal Care:

Communication focuses on education and prevention. Midwives must convey information about fetal growth, nutrition, and danger signs using simple, culturally appropriate language. Active listening and open-ended questions help uncover maternal concerns that may not be immediately expressed. By fostering two-way communication, midwives empower pregnant women to take ownership of their health.



- **During Labor and Delivery:**

The intrapartum period is characterized by high physical and emotional stress. Effective communication at this stage requires calm verbal guidance and empathetic nonverbal behavior. Widiastutik (2025) provides practical examples such as maintaining eye contact, using soothing tones, and offering motivational encouragement (“You are doing great, the baby is coming soon”)—which can significantly reduce anxiety and improve pain tolerance. Continuous verbal reassurance not only comforts the mother but also enhances her cooperation during delivery.

- **During Postpartum Care:**

After childbirth, communication centers on support, adaptation, and education. Midwives guide new mothers on breastfeeding, nutrition, and self-care while monitoring signs of postpartum depression. The tone of communication must shift toward patience and empathy, acknowledging the mother’s fatigue and emotional changes. Encouraging dialogue and validating her experiences build confidence and trust, leading to smoother recovery and stronger mother–infant bonding.

3.4 Communication and Maternal Health Outcomes

The reviewed literature consistently demonstrates that effective communication contributes to measurable improvements in maternal and neonatal outcomes. Trust-based interactions increase adherence to antenatal visits, early detection of complications, and compliance with medication and dietary guidance. Furthermore, therapeutic communication reduces maternal anxiety and enhances the perceived quality of care two psychological factors strongly associated with positive birth experiences [39].

From a physiological perspective, effective communication reduces stress-related hormonal responses such as cortisol release, which can interfere with uterine contractions or delay healing. By promoting relaxation, midwives indirectly contribute to smoother labor progression and faster postpartum recovery. Psychologically, patients who feel heard and respected experience a sense of control over their childbirth journey, leading to lower incidence of trauma or dissatisfaction [40].

The integration of structured communication protocols such as SBAR (Situation, Background, Assessment, Recommendation) also strengthens collaboration among healthcare teams. Clear communication between midwives, nurses, and physicians ensures timely intervention and minimizes clinical errors. In this sense, communication serves not only the patient–midwife relationship but also the broader healthcare ecosystem.

3.5 Challenges in Midwifery Communication

Despite its recognized importance, effective communication in midwifery faces several practical challenges. High patient loads, time pressure, and administrative demands often reduce the time available for meaningful dialogue. Midwives may focus on completing clinical procedures rather than engaging in therapeutic interactions. Additionally, variations in education and communication skills among practitioners create inconsistency in patient experiences [41].

Environmental factors such as crowded wards, noise, and lack of privacy also inhibit open communication. In many healthcare facilities, cultural hierarchies can discourage patients from voicing concerns, while some midwives may inadvertently adopt authoritative communication styles. These barriers underline the need for institutional policies and continuing education programs that prioritize patient-centered communication as a professional standard.

3.6 Cultural Sensitivity and Ethical Considerations

Indonesia’s cultural diversity introduces both richness and complexity into midwifery communication. Effective midwives recognize that beliefs surrounding pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum rituals vary widely. Sensitivity to cultural norms such as modesty, gender roles, and dietary taboos ensures that communication is respectful and relevant. For example, when discussing reproductive health or family planning, midwives must balance clinical accuracy with cultural



discretion to maintain trust [42].

Ethically, communication must uphold principles of autonomy, beneficence, and confidentiality. Midwives are obligated to present information transparently, allowing patients to make informed decisions about their care. The tone and language used should reflect respect for the patient's dignity and avoid coercion or judgment. Building ethical awareness alongside communication skills reinforces professional accountability and strengthens the moral foundation of midwifery practice [43].

3.7 Implications for Education and Practice

Integrating communication skills into midwifery education is crucial. Training curricula should include modules on active listening, empathy, cultural competence, and conflict resolution. Simulation-based learning and reflective practice can help students internalize these skills before entering clinical environments. Continuous professional development programs should also provide opportunities for midwives to refine communication through workshops, peer observation, and feedback sessions [44].

Institutionally, healthcare administrators must recognize that communication quality directly affects service outcomes and patient satisfaction. Policies promoting open feedback, team briefings, and patient-centered ward designs can reinforce the culture of effective communication. Moreover, in the digital era, midwives must adapt to telehealth and electronic record systems while preserving empathy and personal connection.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Effective communication stands as one of the most essential pillars in midwifery practice, shaping both the technical and emotional dimensions of maternal care. This conceptual review concludes that communication is not merely a supportive skill but a clinical competency that directly influences maternal trust, patient satisfaction, and health outcomes. Through therapeutic communication rooted in empathy, respect, and clarity midwives establish trust-based relationships that empower women to actively participate in their care process.

The synthesis of recent literature and professional guidelines highlights that midwives who master verbal and nonverbal communication are better equipped to manage maternal anxiety, prevent misunderstanding, and promote adherence to health advice. Moreover, communication serves as a preventive mechanism against clinical errors and delays in emergency response, contributing to safer births and improved postpartum adaptation. In essence, communication bridges the gap between medical expertise and compassionate care, fulfilling the holistic philosophy of midwifery that integrates body, mind, and emotional well-being.

Despite its critical importance, effective communication often faces barriers related to workload, limited time, and cultural diversity. These challenges indicate the need for institutional support, continuous professional development, and reflective practice to ensure that every midwife maintains and enhances her communication competence throughout her career.

To strengthen communication in midwifery practice, several strategic measures are proposed. First, education and training institutions should integrate communication modules into the core midwifery curriculum, emphasizing therapeutic dialogue, cultural sensitivity, and emotional intelligence. Simulation-based learning and patient role-play can improve both confidence and empathy among students. Second, healthcare facilities should foster a culture of communication by providing regular workshops, team briefings, and peer mentoring programs. Creating patient-friendly environments with privacy, reduced noise, and open feedback systems will also enhance the quality of interpersonal interaction. Third, policymakers and professional organizations should recognize communication as an indicator of service quality. National midwifery standards should include communication assessment as part of licensing and performance evaluation.

Finally, research initiatives are encouraged to explore innovative models of digital and intercultural communication, ensuring that the essence of empathy and understanding remains at



the heart of modern midwifery practice. By prioritizing communication as a clinical and ethical commitment, Indonesia's midwives can continue to advance maternal health outcomes and uphold the trust that lies at the heart of every safe and dignified birth.

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