

Empowering Child Bearing Women

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“As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others”.

Nelson Mandela

Em·pow·er means to give power or authority to; authorize, or to enable or permit: The Origin was around: 1645-55; em- + power. The term “empowerment” has become one of the most widely used development terms. Yet it is one of the least understood in terms of how it is to be measured or observed. It is also a concept that does not merely concern personal identity but brings out a broader analysis of human rights and social justice. At the core of the concept of empowerment is the idea of power. Power is often related to one’s ability to make others do what he/she wants, regardless of his/her own wishes or interests [1-3]. Power exists within the context of a relationship between people or things. By implication, since power is created in relationships, power and power relationships can change [4,5].

Empowerment as a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power in people for use in their own lives, their communities and in their society, by acting on issues they define as important. Self-empowerment means that women gain autonomy, are able to set their own agenda and are fully involved in the economic, political and social decision-making process” [6,7].

An empowered individual would be one who experiences a sense of self-confidence and self-worth; a person who critically analyzes his/her social and political environment; a person who is able to exercise control over decisions that affect his/her life” [8].

Giving birth and becoming a mother, provide amazing opportunities for personal empowerment and transformation. This is a time we are meant to be most powerful yet many women give their power away. Empowerment means “that mothers are accessing resources and opportunities, as individuals and as a group, and that they believe that they have the right and power to make their own decisions” [9].

The possibility of empowerment depends on two things. First, empowerment requires that power can change. Second, the concept of empowerment depends upon the idea that power can expand. This second point reflects our common experiences of power rather than how we think about power [10].

In 2000, at the millennium summit, all 191 United Nations member states signed the millennium declaration which set eight millennium development goals (MDGs) to be achieved by the year 2015. The fifth Millennium Development goal calls for improving maternal health care and includes a target of reducing the maternal mortality ratio by three quarters between 1990 and 2015 and achieving universal access to reproductive health through antenatal care coverage. If the world achieves the fifth Millennium Development Goal by 2015, more than two million women will survive childbirth. Most maternal and child deaths are preventable and avoidable with reproductive health services [11].

Women's relative lack of decision-making power and their unequal access to employment, finances, education, basic health care and other resources are considered to be the root causes of their ill-health and that of their children. Empowering women is critical to advancing human development and achieving progress towards the MDGs [11].

The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD, 1994) in Cairo emphasized that women should be empowered to practice control over their health and reproductive rights. Research study conducted by Hassan HM Zaky, *et al.* 2007 on "the relationship between Women's Empowerment and Antenatal Health Care in Egypt" show that women's empowerment and receiving regular antenatal care are simultaneously determined. Additionally, women's empowerment has a significant and positive impact on receiving regular antenatal care. They recommended that women's empowerment is crucial to improve maternal health care in developing countries [12,13].

Objectives

- To inform and support women and their partners so that they can put decisions about their maternity care firmly in their hands,
- To provide women with all the unbiased, evidence-based information that they need to make informed choices about their care in pregnancy and birth,
- To help her make that right decisions for her to have a healthy positive birth for baby and mum,
- To empower parents to develop practical skills for the birth and parenthood.

Every woman, pregnancy and baby is different, so it's important that each expecting mother has options and care specific to her needs. Empowering of clients recommended that women should participate in the planning of their care and that they should have a right to choose of the type of maternity care received [14].

Empowerment Framework

Agency: Related to personal actions and decisions, and includes: self-esteem, skills, education, employment, mobility and physical integrity.

Structure: Related to institutions, social norms and policies, and includes: marriage, parenting roles and responsibilities, citizenship, rights, justice, access to resources.

Relationships: Related to the form in which the agency and structure manifest themselves in personal interactions, and includes negotiation and concept of oneself and others.

Empowerment indicators, namely: a sense of responsibility and concern for the baby's health; access to information; confidence; support from parents and partners; and quality of care.

Empowerment philosophy recognizes that the individual is the expert in their own life and that they have both the right and the responsibility to make choices regarding their own health [14]. If individuals are given this freedom of choice, they are more likely to make and maintain behavioural change [14].

Empowerment Indicators		
Elements of Empowerment		Indicators
Agency Related to actions, choices, and resources of individuals and groups when they take action.	Knowledge	Knowledge related to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contraception • Transmission of HIV-AIDS • Women's rights • Antenatal and delivery services
	Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New skills for communicating sexual and reproductive health with intimate partner • New skills for communicating with parents
	Self-Esteem	Greater demonstration of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-confidence • Values and goals • Self-esteem
Structure Represents the generally accepted ideas, institutions and norms.		Perceives that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The clinic provides culturally appropriate and high quality services. • women-friendly activities are effective.
Relationships Describes the quality of social interactions through which empowerment is mediated; the social channels through which changes in power relationships flow.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better communication with parents • Improved capacity to negotiate with a partner • Better interpersonal relationships

Components of Empowerment:

- Cognitive
- Psychological
- Economic
- Political
- Social and Legal

Empowered Birth Method

The Empowered Birth Method is a process that enables a woman to transform her birth experience and ultimately her life, by consciously choosing and creating based on her values and priorities, exploring her options, preparing her mind and body and stepping into her true power as a woman. This process also educates and empowers women and couples to embrace a positive, natural childbirth experience. It won't tell you what you should or shouldn't do; rather, its role is to work with you to determine the birth process that will work best for you and then provide relevant information and motivating encouragement to help you reach your goals.

Empowered Birth program, includes:

- Examining own ideals and determine the priorities for self-birth experience
- Learning various childbirth options
- Creating a unique birth plan that feels comfortable to self
- Overcoming fears about giving birth
- Discovering ways to nourish self body and soul throughout the pregnancy

- Gaining useful tools and resources to help to achieve a positive birth experience

Skills necessary for transition to parenthood

- An ability to solve problems and make decisions
- Knowledge of resources and how they can be used
- Stress management techniques
- Flexibility in their approach and thinking
- An ability to recognise their limitations
- Confidence in their competence as parents

Advantages of empowering mother

- Mother will access services without fear of being judged or of freely expressing their concerns.
- partner and/or parental involvement within maternal health care service delivery when appropriate.
- Adapt services to the specific needs and circumstances, keeping in mind their diversity and day-to-day realities.
- Employ multi-disciplinary teams that specialize in health care need of women and who approach care in a way that most effectively addresses the unique biological, social and emotional factors.
- Approach health in a holistic way through providing medical, psychosocial and educational programs and services that improve knowledge, communication skills, personal development and healthy motherhood practices.
- Design flexible payment systems that take into account the socioeconomic realities of mother and help remove barriers to access to quality health services for young women with limited financial resources.
- Continuously evaluate services using feedback from mother about the health services they need, their degree of satisfaction with current services, and their ideas about potential changes and improvements.

Barriers for empowering child bearing women

- Heavy work load of women;
- Isolation of women from each other;
- Illiteracy;
- Traditional views that limit women's participation;
- No funds;
- Disagreements/conflicts;
- Lack of co-operation from partner/family members.

Strategies for the Future:

- a) Education
- b) Research/Documentation
- c) Campaigns
- d) Networking
- e) Training
- f) Media

Conclusion

The job of being a parent in the 21st century is an onerous task, yet our society provides no special training for parenthood. Antenatal education offers an opportunity for empowerment and providing support, information and advice in relation to pregnancy, childbirth

and parenting. It is essential that nurse midwives maintain a vision for the future. Educating parents ought to go hand in hand with supporting them.

Empowerment is still an evolving concept and evidence exists that practitioners still cling to professional dominance and will need to be taught how to enact empowering behaviours and practices [15]. Multidisciplinary team working and the development of trust between mother and midwife will aid transition and accelerate change. One cannot teach self-confidence and self-esteem; one must provide the conditions in which these can develop. Empowerment cannot be developed among “beneficiaries” of programs but only by “participants”. Empowerment requires involving women directly in planning and implementation [15].

“Before you were born I carried you under my heart. From the moment you arrived in this world until the moment I leave it, I will always carry you in my heart”.

Mandy Harrison

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