

RETAINING MIDWIVES ACROSS PROFESSIONAL LIFE COURSE: LESSONS LEARNED FROM A PAN-CANADIAN STUDY

Background

Retention of midwives is of critical importance, primarily due to decline in maternity care provision by physicians and nurses and the aging nursing and midwifery workforce. Research suggests that many midwives are considering leaving their profession [1], but rarely links this decision to a specific career stage.

Aims

This paper utilizes a professional life course lens to explore the unique challenges faced by early-, mid- and late-career midwives. Specifically, it examines (a) what factors impact midwives' decisions to stay in the profession, (b) how does career stage (early-, mid-, late-) can shape midwives' decision to leave the profession, and (b) what can be done to improve retention of midwives at different career stages.

Methods

This paper is based on the results from a pan-Canadian mixed-methods study that involved a cross-sectional survey and qualitative interviews with midwives across Canada. Upon ethics approvals, the survey was completed by 615 midwives and focused on satisfaction with pay, coworkers, rules and regulations, fringe benefits, job physical demands, and work-personal life interface. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 19 midwives across Canada to gain a more in-depth perspective on the challenges experienced in the workplace and the factors shaping their decision to stay in practice or leave the profession. Each dataset was analyzed separately and merged in the final stage of analysis.

Results

Findings show that while 1/3 of midwives consider leaving the profession, midwives at different career stages face challenges unique to these stages, especially when it comes to issues at the interface of work and personal life. Specifically, midwives in earlier career stages often struggle to find suitable working arrangements and experience challenging work environments including tension with senior colleagues. Mid-career midwives experience challenges balancing the demands of work and personal life, especially those related to caregiving and family responsibilities. For late-career midwives, the physical demands of the profession and lack of opportunities for professional growth emerged as key challenges. Most participants felt the interference of work with personal life is a key factor in the decision to leave the profession.

Discussion

To improve midwifery retention in Canada, the challenges faced by midwives at various career stages should be taken into consideration. Anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies, flexible work models and more opportunities for professional growth within midwifery can positively impact retention of midwives in Canada. Life course approach provides a useful analytical lens to understand retention. This study did not consider how career stages intersect with other facets of professional identities, including race/ethnicity, gender/sex and context of professional practice (rural/urban). While this is a limitation of this study, the mixed methods approach adds to the robustness of the analysis.

Implications and future perspectives

Applying professional life course lens to the analysis of midwives' retention enables to identify the unique factors that impact the decisions of early-, mid- and late-career midwives to stay in the profession and develop tailored interventions. While the findings from this study are based on the sample of Canadian midwives, lessons learned might be of relevance to other professional jurisdictions struggling to retain maternity care providers and other health care personnel.

References

1. Bloxsome D, Ireson D, Doleman G, Bayes S. Factors associated with midwives' job satisfaction and intention to stay in the profession: An integrative review. *Journal of clinical nursing*. Feb;28(3-4):386-99, 2019.