

THE EXPLORATION OF PROFESSIONAL MIDWIFERY AUTONOMY: UNDERSTANDING AND EXPERIENCES OF FINAL-YEAR MIDWIFERY STUDENTS.

Background

The concept of professional midwifery autonomy holds great significance in midwifery education. Notably, clinical placements play a crucial role in introducing students to its concept. However, the understanding and experiences of students regarding midwifery autonomy are relatively unknown.

Aim(s)

This study aimed to examine the experiences and understanding of midwifery autonomy among final-year midwifery students.

Methods

A qualitative exploratory study using focus group interviews with final-year midwifery students from each of the three Belgian regions; Flanders, Walloon and the Brussels Capital Region. Focus groups were recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed using a thematic analysis.

Results

Students emphasized the importance of promoting professional midwifery autonomy through the ability to make their own professional decisions and take initiatives. They highlighted the need for a safe and supportive learning environment that encourages independent practice, nurtures self-governance and facilitates personal growth. Additionally, collaborative relationships with other maternity care professionals and increased awareness among women and the broader healthcare community were identified as essential factors in embracing and promoting professional midwifery autonomy.

Discussion

Our study provides valuable insights into the significance of midwifery autonomy among final-year midwifery students, emphasizing the need for supportive learning environments, collaborative relationships and further education to promote autonomy in midwifery. By actively cultivating a safe and supportive learning environment, educators can contribute to the development of a truly autonomous midwifery profession, ultimately improving maternal and new-born health.

Implications and future perspectives

The findings of this study have important implications for midwifery education and practice. Midwifery educators and preceptors can inform their practices by fostering a comprehensive understanding of professional midwifery autonomy and promoting independent yet collaborative work. Creating a supportive learning environment, addressing contextual factors, overcoming challenges to autonomy, and promoting dialogue and collaboration among midwives are key recommendations. By implementing these strategies, midwifery educators and preceptors can effectively support the development of midwifery students' autonomy, enhancing their professional growth and preparing them for autonomous midwifery practice. This, in turn, contributes to improving care for mothers and new-borns, ensuring optimal outcomes and well-being for both.