

In search of quality care. The changing landscape of maternity care in Poland through the perspective of midwives

Over the past 30 years, maternity care in high-income countries like Poland has become more medicalized and privatized. This shift has weakened the role of midwives and increased inequalities in healthcare. While the development of medical technology helped reducing maternal and infant morbidity and mortality rates, the current levels are no longer associated with better outcomes. Experts emphasize the importance of relationship-based, midwife-led models of continued maternity care, as they proved to significantly improve outcomes. However, this midwife-led care model is rarely available through public health programs and, in many countries, is instead offered as a private service.

Successful implementation of structural changes in maternity care to increase its quality requires thorough understanding of the local contexts, including critical analysis of the power dynamic in maternity care and areas of professional jurisdictions, midwives' interactions with temporality and materiality of birth, or alignment with midwifery values. However, those aspects are rarely examined in relation to midwife-led models of care.

This research proposal responds to this gap. Starting from the assumption that improving access to quality maternity care in Poland requires structural changes and extension of relation-based care and those changes to be implemented successfully need a deep and critical understanding of the local contexts, this study seeks to explore the lived experiences and practices of midwives providing maternity care in Poland as well as their working patterns, workload and the possible struggles in their professional jurisdictions. By looking at how midwives navigate the landscape of maternity services in Poland and how they negotiate their professional authority and autonomy, as well as by exploring their working patterns and workload, and scope of professional activities we aim to illuminate the workings of the maternity care and explore the possible pathways for structural change.

In order to fulfil the aims of this study, we will made use of the qualitative and quantitative methods of research:

1. the qualitative methods of research based primarily on semi-structured interviews with midwives from various areas of maternity care and some elements of the participant observation and analysis of the secondary sources of information
2. online questionnaire addressed to midwives to investigate work patterns, workload factors affecting the preference of working in particular models of care.

The goal is to uncover insights that could lead to meaningful improvements in maternity care in Poland.