

# Respectful childbirth: Taking stock

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# Outline

- “ Health consequences of disrespect and abuse in health care facilities
- “ Human rights implications

# Disrespect and abuse during facility-based childbirth

- “ Not a new phenomenon [1]
- “ Not restricted to childbirth but extends to many sexual and reproductive health services

# Health consequences

- “ Discourages institutional delivery – not only among those who have themselves experienced disrespect and abuse but among others all women:
- “ 82% home deliveries were occurring in Jharkhand, India in 2007-08: women reported that they were afraid of being beaten, threatened, and being stripped down during delivery in front of male doctors and strangers [2].
- “ In a study conducted in the urban slums of Punjab, India 53% of women said they chose to have home deliveries as a result of non-cooperative attitude and misbehaviour of the hospital staff towards women[3].

# Health consequences

- “ Higher morbidity resulting from unnecessary and irrational interventions (e.g. unnecessary c-sections, routine episiotomy, routine augmentation of labour with oxytocin) [1]
- “ Delay in timely intervention due to neglect and abandonment resulting in deaths or disability [1]
- “ Postpartum blues and depression precipitated by hostility towards women who are not implicitly obedient, verbal abuse and painful interventions without providing pain-relief
- “ Resort to unsafe abortion even when legal because of lack of privacy and confidentiality and hostile and abusive behaviours of providers [1]
- “ Delays in seeking care for abnormal vaginal discharge for fear of being abused by providers – late presentation for serious STIs and cervical cancer

# Disrespect and abuse are human rights violations [4]

Categories	Corresponding rights
Physical abuse	Freedom from harm and ill treatment
Non-consented care	Right to information, informed consent and refusal, and respect for choices and preferences, including the right to companionship of choice wherever possible
Non-confidential care	Confidentiality, privacy

# Disrespect and abuse are human rights violations [4]

Category	Corresponding rights
Non-dignified care (including verbal abuse)	Dignity, respect
Discrimination based on specific patient attributes	Equality, freedom from discrimination, equitable care
Abandonment of care	Right to timely healthcare and to the highest attainable level of health
Detention in facilities	Liberty, autonomy, self-determination and freedom from coercion

## Identifying solutions from a human rights perspective [5]

“ Rather than “subsume” individual experiences of abuse under a human rights norm, construct the particulars of the norm through women’s lived experience.



## Identifying solutions from a human rights perspective [5]

- “ Locate and understand disrespect and abuse within the context of institutional cultures of medical facilities, and seek for change from within

## Identifying solutions from a human rights perspective [5]

- “ Understand the role of structural injustices in perpetuating disrespect and abuse – health systems are social institutions
- “ Take into account global forces that are undermining health systems

# Align with larger social movements

“ Changing disrespect and abuse during childbirth in facilities is part of a larger struggle for universal access to health care, social justice and equality, and the right to a life of dignity.

# References

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4. Respectful maternity care: the universal rights of childbearing women. Washington, D.C, White Ribbon Alliance, 2011.
5. Erdman JN. Bioethics, human Rights, and childbirth. *Health and Human Rights* 2015; 17(1).