



FYI : The art of midwifery

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For ages, the process of giving birth has been a very intimate experience in a woman's life – a time when she goes through many mental and physical changes and has her whole life turned inside out. Most women approach pregnancy with doubts and fear in their minds because of the drastic changes to their bodies. It can get overwhelming. For this reason, midwives and doulas provide the gentle nurturing that a mother would need when about to give birth.

Wondering what is midwifery? Here it is: Midwifery is the health science and health profession that deals with pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period (including care of the newborn), in addition to the sexual and reproductive health of women throughout their lives. In many countries, midwifery is a medical profession (special for its independent and direct specialised education; should not be confused with a medical specialty, which depends on previous general training). A professional in midwifery is known as a midwife.

Recently, this midwifery programme was also introduced in India. A professional midwife has been trained to international standards that have been certified, and they go through a structured programme. Indie Kaur, director of midwifery at Fernandez Hospital, says, “A midwife’s job would be to look after a mother in the antenatal intrapartum, which is the birth postnatal period, and give her continuous care. She would be trained to birth mothers without medical complications and with medical complications in collaboration with obstetricians. Research shows that 83% of births in India can be supported by professional midwives.

Doulas, on the other hand, are not trained to birth the mother and provide the mother with medical care. They mainly provide emotional support. But a midwife and doula combination really puts the family in a great position to have healthy, happy, and satisfying outcomes during pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum. And if you look at all the evidence, it shows that support from these two professionals lowers interventions and reduces inductions of labour. You have shorter labours because the mother knows and trusts the team.”

The Fernandez Foundation provides dignified care to women and their families. They look after all women from all spectrums and from disadvantaged communities. Along with midwifery, they go out to government institutions and reach out to the communities to help women who can’t afford care.

Research indicates that a woman’s experience during childbirth is heavily linked to her mental health. The more at ease a woman is, the more likely she is to have an easier time giving birth. A professional doula, Dr. Pooja, a Lamaze Certified Childbirth Educator, Certified Birth Doula, Hypnobirthing Practitioner, and Lactation Counselor, explains what her job entails: “Doulas are non-medical professionals. So we do not give any medical advice to the mother during our pregnancy, nor do we do any clinical work. So, for example, we do not interfere with the birthing process. We do not perform any internal checks during labour. We do not interpret the baby’s heartbeat.

During labor, we do not physically examine the mother or the baby. So, we do not do any medical work as such. But we provide physical and emotional support for her. So physically, helping her with movement, mobility, positioning during labour, helping her with massages, offering the different comfort measures to her during this process, ensuring that her basic needs during labour are taken care of, offering the different techniques of relaxation, creating a very calm, gentle, ideal environment for her, so that with her being relaxed, with all of this, she is producing the right hormones that help her cope.”

Indie talks about women who have been abused in their childhood in the past. She says for women for whom childbirth is a sensitive subject, a midwife or doula could be of help and explains, “Women who have been through sexual abuse are the women that we really need to handhold. We work very closely with the wider team to help support women and develop strategies to help them cope with labour and birth. And some of the women that we’ve looked after, we trained our midwives with such sensitivity that sometimes during birth, they don’t do a single vaginal examination, keeping in mind what the woman has gone through, and the prevalence of sexual abuse is much higher than we know. But women tend not to talk about it, but we see signs of it when they come in, you know, acting in a different way. Sensitivity is needed, and it’s so powerful to help a woman when she’s been through such an experience.”

She says that every day she sees how important the work they do is, and she hopes to see midwifery become more popular in India in the years to come.



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