

ARTICLE

THE ROLE OF MEDICAL-LEGAL ETHICS IN MIDWIFERY PRACTICE- A STUDY CONDUCTED IN PEMATANGSIANTAR CITY OF NORTH SUMATRA- INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

The core of operation of any profession is its ability to have standards and regulations that govern its practice. Ethics is one way in which professionalism can be exercised in a profession especially a medical profession in which errors can lead to disastrous. This study was conducted among the midwives in Indonesia to identify the role of medical legal and ethics in practice of midwifery. Also the level of understanding of legal and malpractice issues was ascertained using questionnaires. Results showed that the level of knowledge of midwives concerning medical legal issues and ethics was poor especially in the rural setting. Therefore, action needs to be taken to increase awareness on malpractice and importance of having medical legal understanding of the practice. Midwives are the main providers of health services to the community in a health facility and thus form a bigger portion of the health workforce. Since the midwives are the cornerstone in the provision of services, they have to operate in a professional way and comply with the rules and regulation given by the medical practice. The midwives and the nurses provide unique services to patients and thus require knowledge and skills to identify complications early and act accordingly. However, their decision making in clinical practice has to abide by the rights and code of conduct aimed at proper ethics in the hospital.

INTRODUCTION

Ethics is defined as the study of philosophy that deals with human behavior and their ability to distinguish right from wrong, good from bad as the individuals relate with one another. Midwives are required to protect, promote, and optimize health service through prevention of injury to the patient [1]. Also, they alleviate suffering by identifying and treating disease and promoting care in the community. Therefore, nurses and midwives should not only understand the ethics but also display them in their practice [2].

Midwives provide most of the emergency services required in a hospital and thus have a difficult task to engage in and with the shortage of midwives and adverse working conditions; there has been an increase in lawsuits as delivery of services has been compromised. Increased workload and shortage of workers are the main factors for the increase in unethical practices as the midwives have a low morale and provide substandard service to patients. The quality of care and services provided by the midwives is highly dependent on the sound decisions made by the midwives in a daily routine [3].

Therefore, this study was conducted to determine the role of ethics in preventing malpractice and promoting better service provision to patients. Also, the study was conducted to identify the best practices and ethics in the profession. Moreover, the study identified ongoing strategies to reduce the level of malpractice in midwives. The midwives play an integral part of health care in Indonesia as studies show that most patients seek medical care from midwives compared to other practitioners in the country [4].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study conducted was conducted using questionnaires structured to assess the degree of awareness among the midwives of Indonesia. A study sample was selected at random from the hospitals in Pematangsiantar city of North Sumatera, Indonesia. Those with special skill in the field such as medical personnel and trained nurses were excluded from the study. The midwives were guided in detail the ethical principles and view of the study and their informed consent obtained.

To determine the level and role of legal awareness as understood by the midwives, a cross-sectional study was carried out. Also, the midwives were asked whether they had any training in the legal aspects and ethical issues involved in the midwifery practice considering the high levels of malpractice and lawsuits. The midwives were also assessed to identify if they had any information about legal complaints leveled against the midwives and any action taken against them. After the interaction, a discussion was conducted to ascertain if knowledge on medico-legal ethics was paramount to the practice of midwifery and the role of medical-legal ethics in midwifery [5].

KEY WORDS

Ethics, medico-legal, lawsuit informed consent, obstetric care, postpartum

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RESULTS

The results obtained were analyzed, and statistics obtained showed that the level of awareness and knowledge of various medical-legal ethics was poor. Analysis of the results based on the time in the midwifery and level knowledge in legal practices showed that midwives with more than ten years in the field understood the role of medical-legal ethics in practice. When age was used as a factor, the level of knowledge increased with an increase in age of the midwives. When the midwives were asked whether they had any training on legal issues and midwifery practice, the majority of the response was that they had no legal training in midwife practice. From the study, the major factors contributing to the low levels of legal ethics were ignorance, lack of time and lack of technological skills

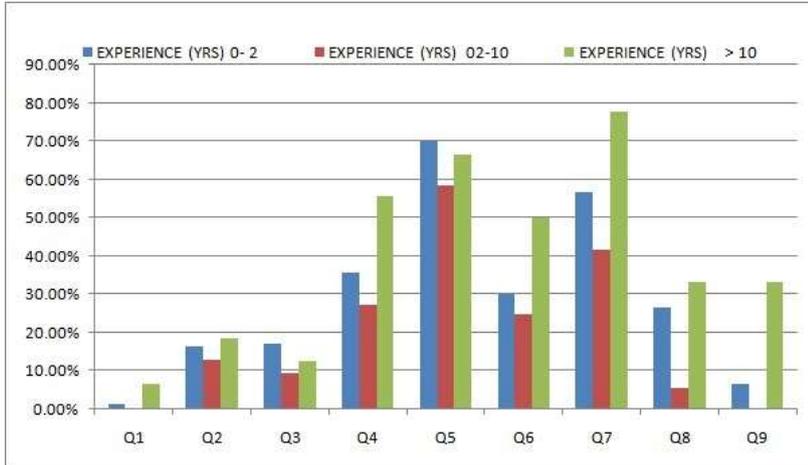


Fig. 1: Level of experience of midwives and awareness of medical legal issues and ethics.

Q1 to Q9 represent the different hospitals that we conducted our research and their corresponding responses, with those in the rural setting having a higher percentage.

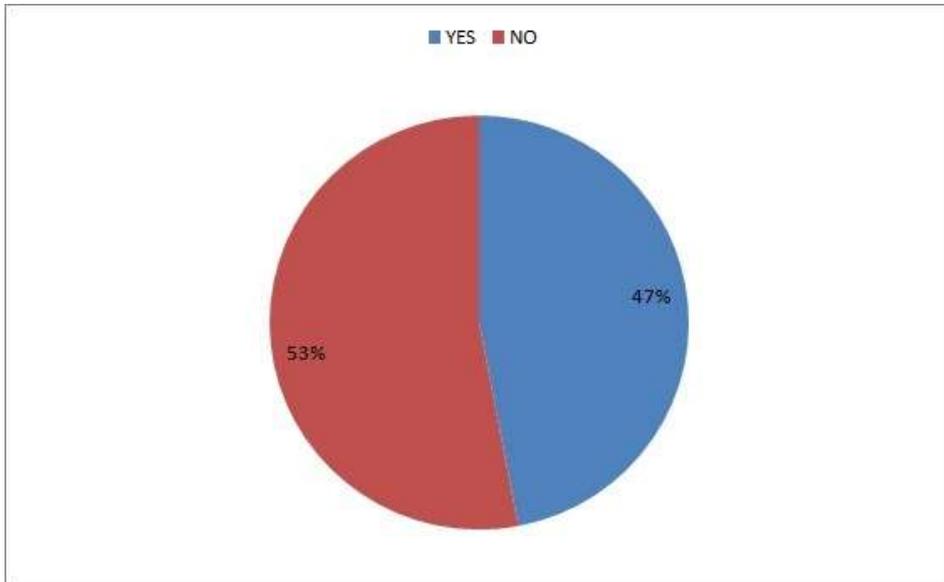


Fig. 2 : Level of awareness of about complaints in hospitals made against midwives.

DISCUSSION

Midwives are the largest group of health care providers forming the health care contributing to more than 50% of the deliveries done in Indonesia [6]. They play an important role, and due to ignorance of the patients they are in large part safe from law suits, but this would not be available for a long duration of time as the patients are getting informed [7]. Our study revealed that most of the midwives had information mainly obtained from training in ethics and legal affairs. The results showed that most of the

medical-legal issues arose due to negligence and lack of skills and knowledge in the practice of midwifery [8].

All midwives should be well aware of the laws and ethics involved in the practice of midwifery. For instance, midwives are required to obtain informed consent from the patients before any procedures are done to the patient in writing and signature, failure to which they would be accountable in case of any damages or injury to the patient [9]. Also, it is a responsibility of midwife to ensure that documentation of the details of the patient is done correctly including vitals, bio data, and medication to avoid random errors and avoidable mistakes [10].

It is the duty of a midwife to ensure that all patients have a right to privacy of all medical records and personal information [11]. The legal responsibility of midwives is to provide help in conducting normal deliveries and provision of advice to pregnant women and women in the post-partum period. Midwives are therefore not allowed to conduct caesarean sections and complicated deliveries [12].

CONCLUSION

Analysis of the results led to the realization that a lot of issues have to be addressed regarding medico-legal and ethical issues involved in midwifery practice. The increasing role of a midwife means that the midwife should be provided with the necessary skills and training to ensure that the level of malpractice due to negligence is reduced [13]. Having identified the level of legal knowledge of the midwives, it is prudent to say that legal knowledge is beneficial in midwifery practice [14]. The study has corroborated with the fact that midwives need to be equipped with necessary legal and ethical knowledge to guide their practice as lawsuits are rising steadily [15].

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All the authors declare no conflict of interest.

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