

The Evidence for Compassion in Midwifery: Building a Global Research Network to Transform Maternal Care

The International Research Network for Compassionate Midwifery (IRNCM)

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Introduction

Despite advances in maternal healthcare, clinical innovation alone has failed to eliminate outcome inequities. Evidence across both high and low resource settings highlights experiences of disrespect, emotional neglect, and mistreatment (Bohren et al., 2015; Mirzania, 2025; Vedeler et al., 2023).

Compassionate midwifery care is essential for improving outcomes, yet it is not seen as a priority topic for research. The International Research Network for Compassionate Midwifery (IRNCM) was established to advance the evidence in this area and build a body of knowledge that can be used to inform and transform maternity care.

Compassionate Midwifery Care

Compassionate midwifery can be defined as a process which incorporates: recognition of distress, emotional or cognitive resonance, the motivation to help, and the clinical action to alleviate distress through:

- Authentic presence ('being with'): establishing a relational connection through attuning and validating actions that ensure the woman feels seen, heard and safe
- Empowerment through agency: contextualising care using encouragement, mutual trust and providing information to strengthen the woman's sense of autonomy
- Small acts of kindness: practical, humanizing gestures that transform the clinical into a supportive, compassionate experience

(Menage et al. 2020; Vedeler et al. 2025)

Research on Compassion in Midwifery

Emerging evidence suggests that compassionate midwifery enhances women's sense of safety and self-efficacy, reduces anxiety, and strengthens trust in care providers, ultimately improving clinical outcomes (Menage et al., 2020). However, research in this field remains fragmented and unevenly distributed across global contexts.

Given the likelihood of significant cultural variations in the understandings, expectations, and language surrounding compassionate care, further empirical studies are essential. Investigating these diverse perspectives is crucial for generating insights that can transform care delivery and inform practice across different cultural settings.

Who are We?

IRNCM is a not-for-profit community group and global platform dedicated to generating, curating and translating research on compassionate midwifery to strengthen evidence-based maternity care.

Established in 2025, IRNCM members are all midwives who have conducted, or are currently conducting, research into compassion in midwifery settings. Current members have conducted research in UK, Norway, Ethiopia, Uganda, South Africa, Australia and Turkey



IRNCM

Key Areas of Research

- The nature and experience of compassionate midwifery from the woman's perspective
- Midwives perceptions of compassionate midwifery
- How student midwives learn about compassionate care
- Culture and language differences regarding compassionate midwifery
- Concepts closely related to compassionate midwifery – links between compassionate care and respectful care, emotional intelligence, civility
- Barriers to compassionate midwifery
- Compassionate leadership in midwifery
- Self-compassion

JOIN US

If you are a midwife researching any aspect of compassion or if you want to know more about the evidence and the work of the IRNCM, get in touch via Instagram @[compassionatemidwiferyresearch](https://www.instagram.com/compassionatemidwiferyresearch) or our website

www.irncm.org

Our Aims

Highlight the importance of compassionate midwifery, building the evidence base to improve maternity care worldwide by:

- Raising the profile of compassion in the midwifery profession and wider maternity services
- Encouraging more research on compassionate midwifery at local, national, and international levels
- Learning from each other and disseminating knowledge to broader audiences
- Supporting members and new midwife researchers studying compassion
- Serving as curators of a repository for all research on compassion in midwifery
- Providing evidence and expert advice on compassionate midwifery care
- Fostering partnerships with organizations in midwifery and maternity care and compassion research

Next Steps

- Growing the network by increasing the membership
- Associate membership for midwives who are not researchers
- Identifying and prioritizing the most pressing gaps in the research
- Sharing and disseminating knowledge - seminars, webinars, workshops
- Collaborating on international research projects
- Building collaborations across policy and practice to transform care

References

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