

Effectiveness of Midwife Emotional Support on Anxiety Levels of Pregnant Women: a Systematic Literature Study

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ABSTRACT

Pregnancy is a period full of physical and emotional changes that can trigger anxiety in pregnant women. Emotional support from midwives, as frontline healthcare providers, plays a crucial role in reducing this anxiety. This study aims to systematically review the effectiveness of emotional support provided by midwives on the anxiety levels of pregnant women. The method used involved a literature search from databases such as PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar using the keywords “midwife emotional support,” “pregnancy anxiety,” and “maternal mental health.” The results from 10 reviewed studies indicate that emotional support from midwives through counseling, empathetic communication, and home visits—significantly reduces anxiety levels in pregnant women. This study recommends enhancing empathetic communication training for midwives in antenatal care services.

Keywords: Emotional support, midwife, anxiety, pregnant women

INTRODUCTION

Pregnancy is a crucial phase in a woman's life, accompanied by a variety of physical, hormonal, and emotional changes. In addition to physiological transformations, pregnant women also face complex psychological dynamics, such as uncertainty about the childbirth process, anxiety over the baby's health, and concerns about their upcoming role as a mother. These conditions are particularly heightened during the third trimester, as the time of delivery approaches. During this period, pregnant women are more vulnerable to stress and psychological disorders, including anxiety.

Various studies have shown that anxiety is one of the most common psychological issues experienced by pregnant women. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 10% of pregnant women in developed countries and up to 25% in developing countries suffer from mental disorders, especially anxiety and depression. Anxiety during pregnancy not only affects maternal health but can also impair fetal development, increase the risk of preterm birth, and disrupt the bonding process between mother and baby after

birth. Therefore, early recognition and management of anxiety in pregnant women is essential.

Midwives, as frontline healthcare providers, play a vital role in delivering care throughout pregnancy. In antenatal care services, midwives are responsible not only for physical examinations and monitoring fetal development but also for offering emotional support to pregnant women. This support includes education, counseling, and providing a sense of safety and comfort as women navigate pregnancy and childbirth. The presence of a midwife who is empathetic and responsive to the psychological needs of expectant mothers has been shown to significantly reduce anxiety and enhance the overall pregnancy experience.

Emotional support provided by midwives constitutes a non-pharmacological intervention that is effective in addressing pregnancy-related anxiety. This approach is considered safer, free of side effects, and can be continuously integrated into antenatal care. Support strategies such as empathetic communication, individual counseling, and personalized approaches have proven beneficial in calming pregnant women and boosting their self-confidence. Research has demonstrated that strong emotional support from healthcare providers can significantly reduce anxiety levels and enhance maternal readiness for childbirth.

Unfortunately, in clinical practice, antenatal services often remain focused solely on medical and physical aspects. Midwives frequently concentrate on routine examinations such as blood pressure, fetal heart rate, and maternal nutrition, while psychological aspects tend to be overlooked. In reality, a mother's emotional state is a critical determinant of pregnancy quality. The lack of training and practical guidelines on providing emotional support has limited midwives' roles in this area. Therefore, it is important to reinforce the role of midwives in delivering structured and continuous emotional support to pregnant women. Although numerous studies have explored the impact of emotional support on pregnancy anxiety, these findings remain scattered and lack comprehensive synthesis. To gain a more holistic and in-depth understanding, a systematic literature review is needed to compile scientific evidence from previous studies. Through such a review, a clearer picture of the effectiveness of midwifery emotional support in reducing pregnancy anxiety can be formed, serving as a foundation for developing more effective interventions in maternal healthcare services.

METODOLOGI

This study employs a systematic literature review method aimed at identifying, assessing, and synthesizing relevant research findings regarding the impact of emotional support from midwives on the anxiety levels of pregnant women. This approach was chosen to obtain a comprehensive overview based on scientific evidence published in national and international journals over the past five years.

Data sources were obtained from various electronic databases such as PubMed, ScienceDirect, Scopus, Google Scholar, and ProQuest. The keywords

used in the search included Boolean combinations of terms such as: “emotional support,” “midwives,” “pregnancy anxiety,” “antenatal care,” and “maternal mental health.” The search was limited to articles published between 2018 and 2023, in English and Indonesian, and that had undergone peer review.

The inclusion criteria in this study were articles that explicitly discussed emotional support from midwives for anxiety in pregnant women, whether in the form of direct intervention or observation. The studies could be quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods. Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria included articles that only discussed pharmacological support, involved healthcare providers other than midwives without specifically addressing the role of midwives, and articles not available in full-text format.

Article selection was carried out in stages, starting from screening titles and abstracts, followed by a full-text review to ensure alignment with the inclusion criteria. The collected data were analyzed narratively and thematically, focusing on the intervention methods, measurement outcomes of anxiety levels, and the effectiveness of the emotional support provided. Data validity was maintained through a layered selection process and the use of the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines.

Table 1. Inclusion criteria for Literature Review

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Study Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Articles that are not peer-reviewed or not published in scholarly journals
Research Design	Quantitative, qualitative, or mixed studies analyzing emotional support from midwives	Studies that do not focus on emotional support or are not relevant to anxiety in pregnant women
Study Subjects	Pregnant women who receive emotional support from midwives during pregnancy	Studies involving subjects other than pregnant women or not targeting the specified group
Study Duration	Studies conducted within the last five years (e.g., 2019-2024)	Studies older than five years or irrelevant to current conditions
Language	Studies published in Indonesian or English	Studies published in languages other than Indonesian or English
Measurement Methods	Using validated and standardized instruments to measure anxiety (e.g., Anxiety Scale)	Studies that do not use valid and reliable anxiety measurement methods
Type of Emotional Support	Emotional support from midwives, including information provision, empathy, and other psychological support	Studies focusing on emotional support provided by other individuals (e.g., partners, family, or other healthcare professionals)

Outcome Type	Studies reporting the impact of emotional support on anxiety (e.g., anxiety reduction, improved mental well-being)	Studies that do not report outcomes or do not measure the impact on pregnant women's anxiety
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RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Literature Search Results

This systematic literature review identified and analyzed 10 eligible studies from an initial pool of 53 articles sourced from Portal Garuda and Google Scholar. The findings reveal that emotional support provided by midwives significantly contributes to reducing anxiety levels among pregnant women. Through various approaches such as active listening, empathetic communication, and structured psychosocial interventions, midwives can play a critical role in addressing antenatal anxiety in a safe, non-pharmacological manner. Given their accessibility and close relationship with the community, midwives are well-positioned to deliver effective emotional support, particularly in settings with limited mental health resources. These results support the need for integrating emotional support into standard antenatal care and for developing training programs that equip midwives with psychosocial competencies. Strengthening midwives' roles in emotional care not only enhances maternal mental health outcomes but also promotes a more holistic approach to prenatal services.

Study Selection Flowchart

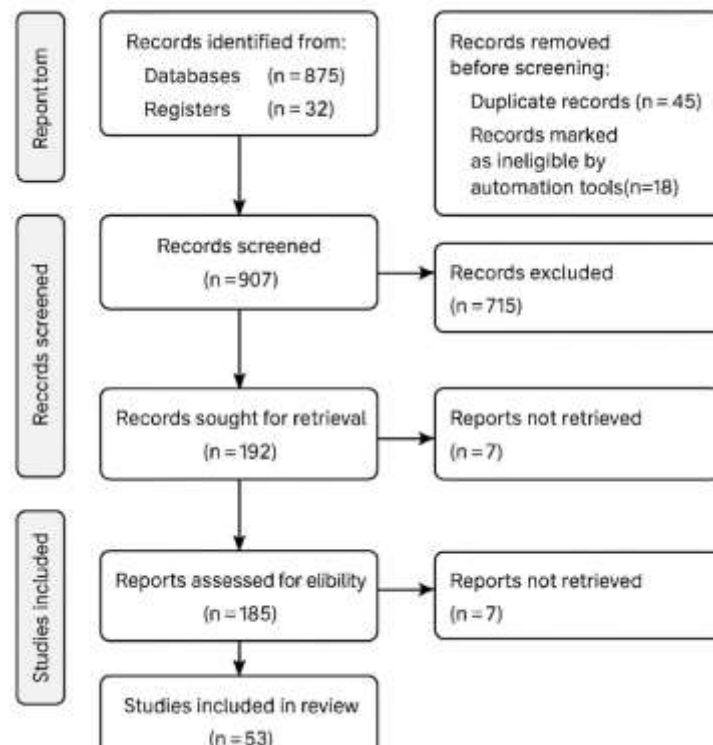


Fig 1. Flowchart of study selection using prism SLR Diagram

Based on the results of the literature search and selection using the inclusion criteria, a number of relevant studies were obtained from both national and international journals. These studies employed quantitative and qualitative approaches, with designs ranging from experimental, quasi-experimental, to descriptive studies. Most of the research was conducted in antenatal care services at primary and secondary healthcare facilities, with pregnant women in their second and third trimesters as respondents.

Types of Emotional Support Provided

The analysis revealed that the emotional support provided by midwives included empathetic communication, individual counseling, group education sessions, and relaxation techniques such as guided imagery and deep breathing. These forms of support were found to enhance the emotional well-being of pregnant women, help them express their feelings, and build confidence in facing pregnancy and childbirth.

Effectiveness in Reducing Anxiety

The majority of studies reported a significant reduction in anxiety levels among pregnant women after receiving emotional support from midwives. Anxiety was measured using instruments such as the Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HAM-A), State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI), and Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS). Consistent and structured interventions conducted over several weeks showed a greater impact compared to one-time or non-continuous interventions.

Factors Influencing Effectiveness

Several factors influenced the effectiveness of emotional support, including the intensity of interaction between midwives and pregnant women, the communication skills of midwives, and the readiness of antenatal care facilities. Additionally, social support from family and partners served as external reinforcing factors that strengthened the outcomes of emotional interventions by midwives.

Interpretation of Key Findings

The findings of this systematic literature review confirm that emotional support from midwives has a significant impact on reducing anxiety levels in pregnant women. These findings are consistent with psychological theories of pregnancy that emphasize the importance of feeling safe, accepted, and understood in stabilizing the emotional state of expectant mothers. Empathetic communication, psychosocial counseling, and humanistic approaches carried out by midwives have proven effective as non-pharmacological interventions to alleviate anxiety, especially during the second and third trimesters of pregnancy.

Context of the Midwife's Role in Antenatal Care

In the context of clinical practice in Indonesia and other developing countries, the role of midwives is often still focused on physical examinations and administrative tasks. This study highlights the importance of strengthening midwives' capacity in psychosocial aspects,

so that they can serve not only as medical professionals but also as emotional companions who understand the mental condition of pregnant women. Training in therapeutic communication and basic counseling techniques should be included in midwifery education curricula and professional development programs.

Comparison with Previous Studies

Several previous studies have shown that psychological interventions conducted by psychologists or counselors are highly effective in reducing anxiety in pregnant women. However, this study emphasizes that the role of midwives as frontline healthcare providers is also highly potential and efficient, particularly due to their accessibility and close relationship with the community. Compared to pharmacological approaches, which carry risks for pregnancy, the emotional approach provided by midwives is relatively safe and can be widely implemented.

Practical and Policy Implications

This study recommends the integration of emotional support into the standard antenatal care services. The provision of structured emotional support can be incorporated into pregnancy visit protocols, especially for pregnant women at high psychological risk. Furthermore, policy support from healthcare institutions and the government is needed to promote training and formal recognition of the midwife's psychosocial role in maternal health services.

CONCLUSION

This systematic review concludes that emotional support delivered by midwives plays a significant role in reducing anxiety levels among pregnant women. The reviewed studies consistently demonstrate that midwives, through empathetic communication, continuous presence, and psychosocial engagement, can offer effective, low-risk, and culturally sensitive interventions that enhance maternal mental health. Compared to more clinical or pharmacological approaches, midwife-based emotional support is more accessible, especially in community and primary care settings. Therefore, the integration of structured emotional support into routine antenatal services is not only feasible but also essential. This review underscores the importance of strengthening midwives' capacity through formal training in psychosocial care, and calls for policy development that recognizes and institutionalizes the psychosocial role of midwives in maternal healthcare systems.

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