



A Comparative Study of Indigenous and Biomedical Knowledge in Maternal Healthcare in Burkina Faso

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Abstract

Maternal healthcare in Burkina Faso operates within a pluralistic system where biomedical and indigenous knowledge systems coexist. A deeper understanding of their interaction is essential for enhancing maternal health outcomes, but comparative research is scarce. This study systematically compared indigenous and biomedical maternal healthcare knowledge and practices. Its objectives were to document indigenous practices, identify points of convergence and divergence with biomedical care, and evaluate community perceptions of both systems. A qualitative, comparative ethnographic design was employed. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with traditional birth attendants, community elders, postnatal women, and biomedical healthcare professionals across three rural regions. Observational data from community settings and health centres were also analysed. The findings reveal a complex interplay between the two systems. A key theme was their complementary use: many women reported utilising indigenous practices for postnatal care, such as herbal baths and abdominal binding, alongside biomedical services for delivery. Indigenous systems were highly valued for cultural and spiritual dimensions of care, while biomedical care was trusted for managing complications. Indigenous and biomedical maternal healthcare in Burkina Faso are not mutually exclusive but are frequently used in an integrated, complementary manner by communities. Dismissing indigenous knowledge risks alienating patients and reducing care-seeking behaviour. Policymakers and health planners should develop frameworks for respectful collaboration and knowledge exchange between practitioners of both systems. Training for biomedical staff should include cultural competency regarding common indigenous practices to facilitate safer, integrated care. Maternal health, traditional medicine, medical pluralism, Burkina Faso, ethnography, healthcare integration. This study provides a nuanced, evidence-based comparison of maternal healthcare systems in Burkina Faso, offering practical insights for developing culturally sensitive maternal health programmes that leverage the strengths of both systems.

Keywords: *Maternal healthcare, Indigenous knowledge systems, Medical pluralism, Sub-Saharan Africa, Ethnomedicine, Comparative study*

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