



A Qualitative Exploration of Comparative Medicine in Rwandan Maternal Healthcare: An African Perspective,

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Abstract

The integration of comparative medicine, involving both biomedical and traditional healthcare practices, is a feature of maternal healthcare in many African settings. In Rwanda, this interplay shapes women's experiences and service delivery, yet nuanced qualitative insights from an African perspective are limited. This study aimed to explore qualitatively the perceptions, experiences, and roles of comparative medicine within Rwandan maternal healthcare from the viewpoints of key stakeholders. A qualitative, exploratory study was conducted using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. A purposive sample of postnatal women, traditional birth attendants, herbalists, midwives, and obstetricians was recruited. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Analysis identified three primary themes: the concurrent and often complementary use of traditional and biomedical care; the central role of family and community in guiding healthcare choices; and systemic challenges in communication between healthcare paradigms. A prominent finding was that many women utilised traditional medicine for postnatal recovery, even when satisfied with biomedical antenatal and intrapartum care. Comparative medicine in Rwandan maternal healthcare is characterised by pragmatic complementarity rather than outright conflict. Understanding this complex ecosystem is crucial for developing culturally safe and effective maternal health policies. Develop frameworks for respectful dialogue and knowledge exchange between traditional and biomedical practitioners. Integrate culturally sensitive counselling on comparative medicine into routine antenatal care. Policy should acknowledge and seek to safely regulate, rather than dismiss, traditional practices. Comparative medicine, maternal health, qualitative research, Rwanda, traditional medicine, healthcare integration. This study provides an in-depth, African-centred qualitative perspective on comparative medicine in maternal care, offering evidence to inform culturally congruent health policy and practice in Rwanda and similar contexts.

Keywords: *Comparative medicine, Maternal healthcare, Sub-Saharan Africa, Traditional medicine, Qualitative research, Healthcare integration, Rwanda*



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