



Navigating the Nexus: A Policy Analysis of Informal Healthcare Provision and Maternal Medicine in Urban South Africa

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Abstract

Maternal healthcare in urban South Africa operates within a dual system, where formal public services coexist with a substantial informal sector. This informal provision includes traditional birth attendants, unregistered pharmacies, and informal drug vendors, forming a significant yet understudied interface with formal maternal medicine. This policy analysis critically examines the intersection between informal healthcare provision and maternal medicine in urban South Africa. It aims to identify key policy gaps and conflicts, and to assess the implications for maternal health outcomes and health system governance. The study employed a qualitative policy analysis framework. Data were synthesised from a systematic review of grey literature, policy documents, and peer-reviewed studies. The analysis focused on regulatory frameworks, service delivery models, and documented practices within selected urban municipalities. The analysis identified a theme of systemic ambivalence. Informal providers are often tacitly relied upon to fill access gaps, yet are systematically excluded from formal policy and training initiatives. A key finding was the widespread provision of uterotonics, such as misoprostol, by informal vendors, which occurs outside of clinical guidelines and with inconsistent counselling. Current maternal health policy does not adequately engage with the informal sector, resulting in a fragmented and potentially hazardous ecosystem for maternal medicine. This policy vacuum undermines patient safety, equity, and the effectiveness of formal maternal health programmes. Develop a pragmatic regulatory framework to guide safe interactions between the formal and informal sectors. Initiate targeted training programmes for informal providers on essential maternal medicines. Strengthen community-level pharmacovigilance and integrate formal referral pathways. maternal health, health policy, informal sector, urban health, South Africa, traditional birth attendants, medicine access This analysis provides a structured policy critique of the informal-formal healthcare nexus specific to maternal medicine in urban South Africa, clarifying systemic tensions and proposing directions for engagement.

Keywords: *Maternal health, Informal healthcare, Urban South Africa, Policy analysis, Traditional birth attendants, Health systems governance, Dual health systems*



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