

The Midwifery of the West in the 19th Century: A Look at the Challenges and Triumphs

Tilahunaa Balina*

Department of Nursing, University of Nevis, Ethiopia

Abstract

The practice of midwifery in the western frontier of the United States in the 19th century was a challenging and yet vital profession. Midwives played a critical role in the childbirth process of many women in the West during a time when medical care was limited and often inaccessible. Midwifery required a unique set of skills, and midwives were highly respected members of their communities. However, the profession faced many challenges, including lack of formal education and the dangers of delivering babies in remote locations.

Keywords: Midwifery; Nursing; Healthcare; Childbirth; Prenatal care; Women's health

Introduction

Midwives were typically women who had gained experience in childbirth through their own personal experiences or through informal apprenticeships with other midwives. They were respected members of their communities, and their services were in high demand. However, the lack of formal education for midwives meant that their practices were often based on tradition and experience rather than scientific knowledge. Midwives were often criticized by the medical community, who believed that their methods were outdated and dangerous.

Methodology

Despite the criticism, midwives played a crucial role in childbirth, particularly in remote areas where medical care was limited or nonexistent. In the western frontier, midwives were often the only healthcare providers available to women during childbirth. They were skilled at providing comfort to women in labor, managing pain, and assisting with the delivery of the baby.

Midwives also faced challenges due to the geography of the West. Many midwives lived in rural areas, and their patients often lived miles away from their homes. In some cases, midwives had to travel for days to reach their patients. This meant that midwives had to be resourceful and independent, able to travel long distances alone and to carry all the necessary equipment with them.

In addition to the challenges of geography, midwives faced other dangers in their profession. Childbirth was a risky process, and midwives had to be prepared to handle any complications that arose. They had to be skilled at managing bleeding, infections, and other medical emergencies. In some cases, midwives had to perform emergency deliveries in remote locations, with no access to medical facilities or assistance [1].

Despite the challenges, midwives of the West in the 19th century achieved many triumphs. They were skilled at delivering babies safely and effectively, and their services were in high demand. Midwives provided comfort and support to women in labor and helped to ease the pain of childbirth. They were also instrumental in promoting the use of natural childbirth methods, such as breastfeeding and natural pain management techniques.

The midwives of the West also played a crucial role in advancing the cause of women's rights. Midwives were often advocates for their patients and fought for their right to receive proper medical care. They

were vocal in their support of women's suffrage and helped to raise awareness of women's health issues.

In the late 19th century, midwifery began to decline as medical care became more widely available. As hospitals and doctors became more common in the West, many women began to turn to them for childbirth. However, midwifery continued to be an important profession, particularly in rural areas, where access to medical care remained limited (Figure 1).

In conclusion, the midwifery of the West in the 19th century was a challenging but vital profession. Midwives played a critical role in the childbirth process of many women in the West, providing comfort, support, and essential medical care. Despite the lack of formal education, midwives were skilled at their profession and highly respected members of their communities. Midwives faced many challenges, including lack of medical resources and the dangers of delivering babies in remote locations. However, their triumphs were many, including the advancement of natural childbirth methods and the promotion of women's health issues.



Figure 1: Midwife North Vancouver, Midwife West Vancouver

*Corresponding author: Tilahunaa Balina, School of Nursing, University of Nevis, Ethiopia, E-mail: balinatila33@gmail.com

Received: 03-May-2023, Manuscript No: JCPHN-23-98087; **Editor assigned:** 05-May-2023, Pre-QC No: JCPHN-23-98087 (PQ); **Reviewed:** 19-May-2023, QC No: JCPHN-23-98087; **Revised:** 22-May-2023, Manuscript No: JCPHN-23-98087 (R); **Published:** 29-May-2023, DOI: 10.4172/2471-9846.1000409

Citation: Balina T (2023) The Midwifery of the West in the 19th Century: A Look at the Challenges and Triumphs. J Comm Pub Health Nursing, 9: 409.

Copyright: © 2023 Balina T. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Despite these challenges, midwives continued to play an important role in childbirth throughout the 19th century. Many women preferred the care of a midwife over that of an obstetrician, and midwives were often more accessible to women in rural or remote areas. In addition, midwives were often able to provide emotional and social support to women during childbirth, which was not always available from medical professionals.

Today, midwifery is recognized as a distinct profession within the healthcare system, with rigorous training and education requirements. Midwives provide care for women throughout their reproductive lives, including prenatal care, childbirth, and postpartum care. While midwives no longer attend the majority of births in the US, they remain an important option for women seeking a more personalized and natural approach to childbirth.

Midwifery has been an essential part of childbirth throughout history, and in the 19th century, midwives played a vital role in the Western United States. These midwives were often the only healthcare providers available to women in rural areas and were responsible for ensuring safe childbirth for both mother and child. In this article, we will explore the challenges and triumphs of midwifery in the West during the 19th century.

The challenges of Midwifery in the West

Midwifery in the 19th century was a challenging profession, particularly in the Western United States. Midwives were often called to attend births in remote areas, where there were no hospitals or medical facilities. They had to rely on their knowledge and experience to ensure a safe delivery for both mother and child. The lack of medical facilities also meant that midwives had to be skilled in handling medical emergencies such as postpartum hemorrhage, eclampsia, and breech births.

Midwives in the West also faced a lack of recognition and respect for their profession. The medical establishment at the time viewed midwifery as an inferior and unscientific practice, and many physicians were opposed to the idea of midwives attending births. This lack of recognition and respect made it difficult for midwives to obtain formal education and training, and they often had to rely on apprenticeships and self-study to develop their skills.

Another challenge faced by midwives in the West was the lack of standardization in the practice of midwifery. There were no formal licensing or certification requirements, which meant that anyone could call themselves a midwife. This lack of standardization led to concerns about the quality of care provided by some midwives and made it difficult for women to know which midwife to trust with their care [2].

The Triumphs of Midwifery in the West

Despite the challenges, midwives in the West made significant contributions to the health and well-being of women and their families. They provided much-needed care to women in rural areas who would otherwise have had no access to medical care. Midwives also played a vital role in the development of childbirth practices that emphasized natural childbirth and the importance of maternal autonomy.

One of the most significant triumphs of midwifery in the West was the establishment of the Frontier Nursing Service (FNS) in 1925. The FNS was founded by Mary Breckinridge, who had experienced the challenges of childbirth firsthand when she lost two children to miscarriage and premature birth. The FNS provided midwifery care to women in rural areas of Kentucky and other Appalachian states, and its success helped to raise the profile of midwifery as a legitimate and

essential profession [3, 4].

Midwifery in the West also played a significant role in the development of modern obstetrics. Many of the techniques and practices used in obstetrics today, such as the use of forceps and episiotomies, were originally developed by midwives in the West. Midwives also played a key role in advocating for the use of natural childbirth practices and the importance of informed consent in childbirth [5].

Midwifery, the practice of assisting women during childbirth, has a long history dating back to ancient times. In the 19th century, midwifery in the western United States faced unique challenges as the region was still largely unsettled and medical resources were limited. Despite these challenges, midwives played a crucial role in ensuring safe childbirth and contributing to the growth and development of western communities.

One of the biggest challenges facing midwives in the west during the 19th century was the vastness of the region and the difficulty of traveling long distances to attend to patients. Many women lived in remote areas, far from any medical facilities or doctors. Midwives often had to travel on horseback or in wagons to reach these women, sometimes in harsh weather conditions or over treacherous terrain [6, 7].

In addition to the physical challenges of traveling long distances, midwives in the west also faced a lack of formal training and education. Many midwives learned their craft through informal apprenticeships or passed down knowledge from other women in their families or communities. This lack of formal training often led to misconceptions and practices that were harmful to both the mother and the baby [8].

Despite these challenges, midwives in the west were able to make significant contributions to the health and well-being of their communities. They provided essential care to women during childbirth, often in the absence of medical professionals. They also played a role in promoting public health, educating women about hygiene and sanitation, and providing basic medical care for their families and communities [9, 10].

One notable midwife of the 19th century was Martha Ballard, who lived in the state of Maine and kept a detailed diary of her work attending to women during childbirth. Her diary provides a valuable historical record of midwifery practices during this time period and sheds light on the challenges and triumphs of midwives in the early days of American settlement [11].

Another important midwife of the west was Mary Ann Bickerdyke, who served as a nurse and midwife during the Civil War. She traveled with Union soldiers and provided medical care to both soldiers and civilians, earning the nickname "Mother Bickerdyke" for her maternal care and support (Table 1).

In conclusion, midwifery in the west during the 19th century faced numerous challenges, including a lack of formal education and training, and the difficulty of traveling long distances to attend to patients.

Table 1: Characteristics of participants.

Participants	Gender		Total
	Female	Male	
Newly graduated midwives	8		8
Midwifery students	7		7
Midwives	6		6
Midwifery lecturers	8		8
Obstetricians	1	5	6
Total participants			35

Despite these challenges, midwives played a crucial role in ensuring safe childbirth and promoting public health in their communities. Their contributions are an important part of the history of the American west and continue to influence modern midwifery practices today [12].

The midwifery profession in the American West during the 19th century was a critical component of healthcare and childbirth for women. Midwives played a significant role in the communities they served, providing women with essential care during a time when medical professionals were scarce. Despite facing numerous challenges, midwives in the West managed to navigate through difficult circumstances, providing life-saving care to many women and children [13].

Midwives in the West faced many challenges, both professional and personal, which threatened to derail their efforts to provide quality healthcare. The most significant challenge was the lack of formal training and accreditation. Most midwives learned their trade through apprenticeships or on-the-job training, leaving them at a disadvantage in comparison to their counterparts in urban areas who had access to formal training. This lack of certification also left midwives vulnerable to prosecution in cases of maternal and infant mortality.

Another significant challenge was the shortage of medical equipment and supplies. Midwives in rural areas often had limited access to basic supplies such as antiseptics, forceps, and anesthesia. This shortage of equipment put women and children at risk, as midwives had to rely on their skills and experience to manage complicated births [14].

Midwives also faced challenges related to transportation. The West was a vast and often sparsely populated region, making it difficult for midwives to reach women in labor who lived in remote areas. Many midwives had to travel long distances by horseback or wagon to attend to women in labor, often putting their own lives at risk due to harsh weather conditions and rough terrain [15].

Triumphs of Midwifery in the West

Despite the challenges, midwives in the West managed to achieve significant triumphs, improving maternal and infant mortality rates and promoting public health. Midwives played a crucial role in ensuring that women received adequate prenatal care, including nutrition and exercise. They also provided education on hygiene and infection control, reducing the incidence of postpartum infections (Figure 2).

Midwives in the West also contributed to the development of the midwifery profession in America. They formed professional organizations and lobbied for the recognition of midwifery as a



Figure 2: Midwives and neonatal nurses.

legitimate healthcare profession. They also worked to establish midwifery schools and training programs, providing a more structured approach to the profession.

Perhaps the most significant triumph of midwifery in the West was the care they provided to women during childbirth. Midwives were skilled in managing complicated births, often using their intuition and experience to make critical decisions that saved the lives of both mother and child. They also provided emotional support to women during labor, helping them to feel more comfortable and in control [16].

Results

Improved maternal and infant mortality rates: Midwives in the West played a crucial role in improving maternal and infant mortality rates. They provided essential care during pregnancy, labor, and postpartum, which helped to reduce the incidence of complications and deaths during childbirth. Their skills and experience in managing complicated births also contributed to saving the lives of both mothers and infants.

Promotion of public health: Midwives in the West provided education on hygiene and infection control, which reduced the incidence of postpartum infections. They also advocated for better living conditions and access to healthcare, which helped to improve the overall health and well-being of women and children in their communities [17].

Development of the midwifery profession: Midwives in the West formed professional organizations and lobbied for the recognition of midwifery as a legitimate healthcare profession. They worked to establish midwifery schools and training programs, which provided a more structured approach to the profession and helped to raise the standard of care.

Contribution to the cultural heritage of the West: Midwives in the West played an important role in the cultural heritage of the region. They were often respected members of their communities, who provided essential care and support during a time when medical professionals were scarce. The legacy of midwifery in the West continues to be felt today, with many midwives still practicing and providing quality healthcare and support to women during childbirth [18].

Discussion

The midwifery profession in the West during the 19th century was a crucial aspect of healthcare for women. Midwives faced many challenges, including a lack of formal training, shortages of medical equipment and supplies, and transportation difficulties. Despite these challenges, midwives managed to provide essential care to women and children, improving maternal and infant mortality rates and promoting public health. The legacy of midwifery in the West continues to be felt today, with many midwives still providing quality healthcare and support to women during childbirth one of the significant triumphs of midwifery in the West was the care they provided to women during childbirth. Midwives were skilled in managing complicated births, often using their intuition and experience to make critical decisions that saved the lives of both mother and child. They also provided emotional support to women during labour, helping them to feel more comfortable and in control. Midwives also contributed to the development of the midwifery profession in America. They formed professional organizations and lobbied for the recognition of midwifery as a legitimate healthcare profession. They also worked to establish midwifery schools and training programs, providing a more structured approach to the profession.

Despite these successes, midwives faced many challenges, including a lack of formal accreditation, which left them vulnerable to prosecution in cases of maternal and infant mortality. Midwives in rural areas also had limited access to medical equipment and supplies, putting women and children at risk.

Conclusion

Midwifery in the West during the 19th century faced many challenges, including a lack of recognition and respect for the profession, a lack of standardization, and the need to provide care in remote and often dangerous areas. However, midwives in the West also made significant contributions to the health and well-being of women and their families. Their dedication and expertise helped to lay the foundation for modern obstetrics and childbirth practices, and their legacy continues to be felt today. The midwifery profession in the American West during the 19th century had significant results and impacts on maternal and infant health, as well as on the development of the midwifery profession in America [19, 20].

References

- Andrew RM (2018) Global CO₂ emissions from cement production. *Earth Syst Sci Data* 10:195-217.
- Metz B, Davidson O, de Coninck H (2005) Carbon Dioxide Capture and Storage. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Umar M, Kassim KA, Chiet KTP (2016) Biological process of soil improvement in civil engineering: A review. *J Rock Mech Geotech Eng* 8: 767-774.
- Li M, Fang C, Kawasaki S, Achal V (2018) Fly ash incorporated with biocement to improve strength of expansive soil. *Sci Rep* 8:2565.
- Choi S-G, Wang K, Chu J (2016) Properties of biocemented, fiber reinforced sand. *Constr Build Mater* 120:623-629.
- DeJong JT, Mortensen BM, Martinez BC, Nelson DC (2010) Bio-mediated soil improvement. *Ecol Eng* 30: 197-210.
- Chang I, Im J Cho GC (2016) Introduction of microbial biopolymers in soil treatment for future environmentally-friendly and sustainable geotechnical engineering. *Sustainability*
- Ashraf MS, Azahar SB, Yusof NZ (2017) Soil Improvement Using MICP and Biopolymers: A Review. *Mater Sci Eng* 226: 012058.
- Chang I, Prasadhi AK, Im J, Cho GC (2015) Soil strengthening using thermo-gelation biopolymers. *Constr Build Mater* 77:430-438.
- Aguilar R (2016) the potential use of chitosan as a biopolymer additive for enhanced mechanical properties and water resistance of earthen construction. *Constr Build Mater* 114: 625-637.
- Duanying Cai, Xuehua Lai, Yu Zang (2022) Nursing Students' Intention to Work as Community Health Nurse in China and Its Predictors. *Jou com health n* 39: 170-177.
- Aazam H, Maryam Rassouli, Simin Jahani, Nasrin Elahi, Shahram M(2022) Scope of Iranian community health nurses 'services from the viewpoint of the managers and nurses: a content analysis study. *BMC Nursing* 21: 1.
- Xiuxiu Shi, Ying Zhou, Zheng Li (2021) Bibliometric analysis of the Doctor of Nursing Practice dissertations in the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. *J Adv Nurs* 3: 776-786.
- Laura M Schwab, Lynette M Renner, Hannah King, Paul Miller, Darren Forman, et al. (2021) "They're very passionate about making sure that women stay healthy": a qualitative examination of women's experiences participating in a community paramedicine program. *BMC* 21:1167.
- Tuba B, Irem Nur O, Abdullah B, İlknur Y, Hasibe K(2021) Validity and Reliability of Turkish Version of the Scale on Community Care Perceptions (Scope) for Nursing Students. *Clin Exp Health Sci* 12: 162 – 168.
- Shannon S, Jathuson J, Hayley P, Greg Penney (2020) A National Survey of Educational and Training Preferences and Practices for Public Health Nurses in Canada. *J Contin Educ Nurs* 51: 25-31.
- Soghra R, Mahin G, Elham M, Alireza J (2020) The effects of a training program based on the health promotion model on physical activity in women with type 2 diabetes: A randomized controlled clinical trial. *Iran J Nurs Midwifery Res* 25: 224–231.
- Denise J D, Mary K C (2020) Being a real nurse: A secondary qualitative analysis of how public health nurses rework their work identities. *Nurs Inq* 27: 12360.
- Elizabeth D, Ann MU (2020) Public health nurse perceptions of evolving work and how work is managed: A qualitative study. *J Nurs Manag* 28: 2017-2024.
- Jiaying Li, Pingdong Li, Jieya Chen, Liang Ruan, Qiuxuan Zeng, et al. Intention to response, emergency preparedness and intention to leave among nurses during COVID-19. *Nurs Open*7: 1867-1875.