



REVIEW ARTICLE

GLOBAL HANDWASHING DAY AND ITS ROLE IN IMPROVING RESPECTFUL MATERNITY CARE IN UTTAR PRADESH

Mirza Adil Beig¹, Dr. Rajeev Kumar Sharma², Dr. Mansi Gauniyal³, Imran Khan⁴ and Dr. Vanisree Ramanathan⁵

^{1,4}Doctoral Student of Population Health Informatics, Dehradun Institute of Technology University; ²Assistant professor, School of Pharmaceutical & Populations Health Informatics, Dehradun Institute of Technology University; ³Public health researcher, Foundation of Healthcare Technologies Society; ⁵Associate Professor, Department of Public Health, Dr. Vishwanath Karad World Peace University, Pune

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INTRODUCTION

Global Hand washing Day, celebrated every year on October 15, underscores the critical role of hand hygiene in preventing infections and promoting global health. Hand washing is a straightforward yet highly effective measure to stop the spread of infections, especially among vulnerable groups such as pregnant women and newborns. In Uttar Pradesh, one of India's most populous states, maternal and neonatal health faces significant challenges, with high rates of maternal mortality and morbidity. Incorporating hand hygiene practices into respectful maternity care (RMC), as outlined by the World Health Organization (WHO), can greatly enhance health outcomes for mothers and newborns. Hand hygiene, particularly when paired with digital health interventions, is essential for fostering a safe, respectful, and healthy birthing environment.

The Role of Hand washing in Respectful Maternity Care: Respectful maternity care (RMC) ensures that pregnant women receive dignified, informed, and harm-free care. A crucial aspect of RMC is maintaining safe, hygienic environments. In Uttar Pradesh, maternal mortality rates remain high, often due to preventable infections like sepsis, which result from inadequate hygiene practices during childbirth. Hand hygiene, a fundamental practice in prevention infection, can significantly reduce these complications, ensuring that healthcare providers offer respectful and safe care to mothers and newborns. In my ongoing PhD research titled "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Respectful Maternity

Care in Pregnant Women Seeking Care at Public Hospitals in Uttar Pradesh," we are investigating how training healthcare providers and mothers on respectful maternity care practices, including hand hygiene, can improve maternity care. This research is particularly relevant in Uttar Pradesh, where healthcare infrastructure is limited, and simple interventions like handwashing could significantly improve maternal and neonatal outcomes.

Handwashing as Part of Respectful Maternity Care: Training on hand hygiene is integrated as a core component of respectful maternity care in my study. By emphasizing the importance of handwashing before and after attending to patients, particularly during delivery and postpartum care, healthcare providers can reduce the risk of infections. Through continuous training sessions and educational materials, healthcare workers and mothers are reminded of the importance of handwashing, reinforcing WHO guidelines on infection prevention. Hand hygiene is crucial in preventing maternal and neonatal infections such as sepsis and postpartum hemorrhage, which are major contributors to maternal and neonatal mortality in Uttar Pradesh. With this m-health intervention, healthcare workers will be regularly reminded to adhere to handwashing protocols, reducing the risk of infections and improving overall maternity care quality.

Impact on Mortality and Morbidity in Uttar Pradesh: In Uttar Pradesh, poor hygiene practices contribute significantly to high maternal and neonatal mortality rates. Research has shown that handwashing can reduce the incidence of infections by up to 40%, particularly in low-resource settings. By integrating hand hygiene into the daily routine of maternity care through m-

health interventions, we can ensure that both healthcare workers and mothers are consistently practicing proper hygiene, leading to a reduction in morbidity and mortality rates. Maternal infections, such as sepsis, are responsible for a large portion of maternal deaths in Uttar Pradesh. Similarly, newborns are highly susceptible to infections acquired during delivery and postpartum care. Handwashing is one of the most effective ways to prevent these infections and improve neonatal outcomes. By promoting hand hygiene through digital health platforms, we can address a key barrier to quality care and enhance the safety of both mothers and babies.

Sustaining Behavioral Change through m-Health Solutions: While handwashing is a simple intervention, ensuring consistent adherence requires sustained behavioral change. This is where m-health interventions play a crucial role. In my PhD study, we are leveraging training to ensure that healthcare providers receive continuous education and about the importance of hand hygiene. Through educational content, healthcare workers are regularly reminded to follow handwashing protocols, particularly at critical times during labor and postpartum care. This intervention also empowers mothers by providing them with knowledge about hygiene practices. Educating mothers about the importance of handwashing allows them to take an active role in protecting their own health and that of their newborns. This approach not only promotes respectful maternity care but also fosters a sense of autonomy and dignity for women during childbirth.

CONCLUSION

Global Handwashing Day serves as an essential reminder of the life-saving potential of hand hygiene, especially in the context of maternal and neonatal health in Uttar Pradesh. Handwashing, integrated into m-health interventions as part of respectful maternity care, can significantly reduce maternal and neonatal mortality and morbidity. As my PhD research on m-health interventions in Uttar Pradesh progresses, the role of handwashing will remain central to improving respectful maternity care and enhancing health outcomes for mothers and newborns. By leveraging digital health tools to promote hand hygiene and respectful care, we can make substantial strides in reducing preventable deaths and improving the quality of maternity care in Uttar Pradesh and beyond.

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