

Position Paper on Unsafe Community Birthing Practices

SARCM has recently been made aware of situations arising within the birthing community of South Africa regarding the practice and endorsement of unsafe birthing/midwifery practices including the trend of guided free birthing/sovereign birthing. This has resulted in an increase in mortality and morbidity in planned home births, putting all home birth care providers at risk. Access to home birth has been under threat for decades from the wider healthcare system, and now, threats to reproductive rights and access are being threatened by the negligence and dangerous ideologies of birth workers/midwives who operate without oversight, regulation, or repercussions.

SARCM provides a platform and encourages solidarity around the aforementioned issues amongst all midwives; SANC and other foreign trained midwives who follow globally-recognized protocols and are all nevertheless being deeply affected by the negligence of certain individuals

While we at SARCM, support the practising rights of Traditional Birth Attendants in their communities, we do not condone the practice of guided free birthing/non-midwifery, where clients are lulled into a false sense of security by the presence and pretence of a birth keeper whom, for whatever reason, chooses not to utilise their training to ensure safety.

Guided sovereign/free birth promotes the unrealistic, idealistic theory that birth exists without complications despite overwhelming current and historical evidence to the contrary. Up to date research states that low risk, home birth is safest when kept and guided by well trained and informed care providers who practice preventative and personally tailored care in line with international standards for evidence-based midwifery care.

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This dangerous new trend, which rebukes safety protocols in favour of new age birth ideologies, is emerging in response to widespread obstetric violence in the private and public sector and swinging the pendulum dangerously in the opposite direction.

SARCM is currently investigating this matter.

SARCM - COMMUNITY MIDWIFERY IN SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa is in dire need of well trained, formally educated, out-of-hospital community midwives, that are self-regulated as well as internally and externally monitored by the regulatory body that oversees out of hospital birth. The public needs to be made aware of evidence, data, and risks involved with every birthing route so that informed and competent decisions can be made. Through education and access we believe SARCM will help the Department of Health and the home birth community see a marked decline in morbidity and mortality and family trauma.

SARCM believes that safety, sovereignty, and informed consent in reproductive health can only be achieved with transparency and a scope of practice within the parameters of evidence-based guidelines. Unregulated and unsupported birth workers/midwives, who fall between the cracks with minimal peer support and oversight, put their clients and the public at risk. The public deserves thorough grievance processes for negligence and malpractice of unethical care providers and community midwives deserve the support and structure of an empowered governing body such as SARCM.

All registered SARCM providers will be required to submit yearly statistics and quarterly mortality and morbidity reports for internal review and public transparency. SARCM's role in our society is to ensure access to out-of-hospital care as well as protecting the public from harmful practices.

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