

Strengthening Theories and Concepts in Midwifery Science: Evolving Concepts, Shaping Future Research and Practice

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Midwifery has adopted and adapted various concepts and theories over time. Key concepts and theories include *normality* and *physiological childbirth*, *health*, *health promotion*, *prevention*, *resilience* and *salutogenesis*, *woman-centered care*, *agency*, *participation*, *empowerment*, *capabilities*, *relationality* and *being-with woman*. These concepts and theories have been significant because they embody midwifery values and philosophy and have often been seamlessly integrated into studies and policy papers. However, many of these theories are underdeveloped and concepts remain undertheorized in midwifery research. For instance, defining the normality or physiology of pregnancy and birth raises questions about what qualifies as “normal” or “physiological” and which criteria are relevant. Additionally, the methodological and theoretical assumptions underlying these concepts have not been sufficiently examined. Questions remain about what these concepts stand for, what they exclude, and how well they align with midwifery care practices and realities.

Conceptual and theoretical work is central to the development of midwifery science and leads to further development of professional practice and independence as an academic discipline. Midwifery science seeks to understand a complex professional field that encompasses material, social, and cultural phenomena; theory is required to tackle this complexity. In relation to the influential program of evidence-based medicine, theoretically grounded and clearly defined concepts are also necessary to operationalize midwifery care interventions and to identify and measure midwifery care-specific outcomes. This ensures midwifery’s legitimacy within policy-related, educational, and healthcare systemic contexts. Furthermore, theories and concepts provide a foundation for reflexive practice by providing tools for critically examining assumptions, norms, and values. Midwifery science, as a practice-based discipline, is inherently interdisciplinary and draws on concepts from other disciplines such as sociology, psychology or obstetrics. Midwifery science is characterized by a close and reciprocal relationship between theory and practice: theoretical concepts must correspond to midwifery practice. They must remain sensitive and responsive to the complex realities of midwifery care practices while being specific and clear without becoming overly rigid.

Based on these premises, this special issue invites scholars from midwifery and related fields to engage in conceptual work within and for midwifery. Contributions are encouraged that address questions such as:

- Where do midwifery concepts or theories come from, and how have their meanings and uses evolved over time?
- How do definitions of midwifery concepts or theories vary across cultural, institutional or national contexts?
- How do midwifery concepts or theories shape practice, research, teaching, and policy?
- Which methodological approaches and methods enhance the empirical grounding and practical relevance of conceptual research in midwifery?
- How can interdisciplinary perspectives such as feminist theory, care ethics, phenomenology, critical theory, or postcolonial theory inform the development and critique of midwifery concepts or theories?
- What are the implications of 'fitting' concepts or theories for future midwifery research, education, and professional identity? Which concepts or theories 'fit'?
- How can ongoing conceptual development support midwifery's adaptation to emerging challenges in global health, sustainability, technology, or social inequalities?

Submission and Review Process

Please submit an abstract of up to 300 words **by March 27, 2026** via redaktion@dghwi.de (Subject Line: Special Issue). Abstracts will be reviewed by the guest editors. Authors will be notified of the decision by 15 April 2026.

Full manuscripts must be submitted **by October 15, 2026** via <https://www.editorialmanager.com/zefh/default.aspx>. All submissions will undergo anonymous peer review and will be published in the summer of 2027. Manuscripts should be 4,000–6,000 words in length and may be submitted in English or German.

Inquiries related to the special issue, including questions about appropriate topics, may be sent to the Guest Editors: annekatrin.skeide@charite.de, annette.bernloehr@hsbi.de, Ute.Lange@hs-bochum.de, Mirjam.Peters@hs-bochum.de.