



Holistic Approaches During Pregnancy and Their Implications for Midwifery Practice

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Abstract. *This literature review explores holistic approaches during pregnancy and their implications for midwifery practice. Holistic care addresses physical, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions of maternal health, aiming to promote overall well-being and positive pregnancy outcomes. By synthesizing evidence from studies published between 2020 and 2025, this review highlights the benefits of integrating holistic methods such as stress reduction techniques, nutritional support, psychosocial counseling, and culturally sensitive care within midwifery. The findings suggest that holistic care enhances emotional resilience, reduces anxiety and depression, and strengthens the mother infant bond. However, challenges remain in standardizing holistic practices, ensuring adequate training for midwives, and overcoming systemic barriers. The review underscores the need for midwives to adopt a comprehensive, woman centered approach supported by ongoing education and interdisciplinary collaboration. Future research should focus on evaluating holistic interventions' effectiveness and developing scalable models to improve maternal and neonatal outcomes globally. Ultimately, holistic pregnancy care offers a promising framework to enrich midwifery practice and support maternal well-being throughout pregnancy.*

Keywords: *Holistic care, Holistic prenatal care, Maternal well-being, Midwifery practice, Mindfulness intervention*

1. INTRODUCTION

Pregnancy is far more than a series of physiological milestones; it is a deeply transformative journey encompassing emotional, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions as well (Lazarevic et al., 2023). Expectant mothers routinely face anxiety about childbirth, physical discomfort, shifting identities, and new social roles all of which can profoundly influence both maternal wellbeing and birth outcomes (Rahmawati & Murtaqib, 2024). While conventional biomedical models have succeeded in reducing maternal mortality by focusing on clinical monitoring, nutritional status, and early detection of complications, they frequently overlook broader needs such as stress management, emotional support, and spiritual care (Cunningham & Brady, 2023). As a result, many women experience gaps in care that undermine their holistic health and the quality of their pregnancy experience.

Pregnancy represents far more than a series of physiological milestones, it is a profoundly transformative journey that encompasses not only the growth and development of new life but also the evolving identity of the mother (Li et al., 2022). As a woman's body adapts hormonal levels shift, cardiovascular demands increase, and musculoskeletal structures realign she simultaneously negotiates shifting emotions, emerging anxieties, and

the weight of new responsibilities (de Waal, Boekhorst, Nyklíček, & Pop, 2023). Traditional biomedical care models have excelled at monitoring these physical changes tracking fetal growth metrics, screening for gestational diabetes, and preventing obstetric complications but they often leave unaddressed the emotional turbulence and social stresses that accompany this life stage (Pham, Koirala, & Kohrt, 2021). In many clinics, prenatal visits are structured around blood pressure readings and ultrasound images, leaving little room for conversations about fear of childbirth, the realities of body image in flux, or the impact of life circumstances such as financial insecurity or strained family relationships (Tumwine, Aggleton, & Bell, 2021).

Recognizing these gaps, a holistic approach to prenatal care has emerged, one that intentionally weaves together physical, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions into a unified tapestry of support (Martin & Gurven, 2022). Under this paradigm, a midwife or care provider does more than prescribe vitamins or perform routine exams, offers guided relaxation exercises and mindfulness practices to calm a mother's anxious mind, provides gentle movement classes or yoga sessions to foster physical comfort and self-awareness, and facilitates group circles where women share stories, normalize their fears, and build lasting peer networks. Nutritional counseling becomes an act of empowerment rather than a list of dos and don'ts, encouraging women to honor their unique cultural food traditions while optimizing fetal growth. At the same time, spiritual care whether through quiet reflection, prayer, or community rituals acknowledges that for many women, faith and meaning-making are as vital as any clinical intervention (Douglas et al., 2022).

A growing body of research underpins the value of these integrated strategies (Babbar, Oyarzabal, & Oyarzabal, 2021). Women who participate in holistic prenatal programs report lower levels of depression and anxiety, stronger bonds with their unborn babies, and greater confidence in their birthing bodies. Group prenatal care models have demonstrated not only improved clinical outcomes such as reduced rates of preterm birth but also heightened feelings of belonging and mutual support among participants (El Hajj, Sitali, Vwalika, & Holst, 2020). These psychosocial gains translate into tangible health behaviors, mothers are more likely to attend all recommended prenatal appointments, adopt healthier nutrition and exercise routines, and follow through with postpartum care plans. Such benefits align closely with international guidelines calling for respectful, person-centered maternity care that honors the whole woman, not just her pregnant belly (Aynalem, Melesse, & Bitewa, 2023).

Yet despite mounting evidence and vocal support from global health organizations, holistic care remains unevenly adopted in everyday midwifery practice (Tesfaye, Solomon, Getachew, & Biru, 2022). Systemic barriers ranging from limited reimbursement for non-medical services to time constraints in busy clinics often relegate emotional and social supports to the margins of care (Tumuhaise, Kabanda, Nanyingi, & Kiconco, 2021). Many midwives receive little formal training in cultural competency, trauma-informed communication, or complementary therapies, making them ill equipped to deliver these services even when they recognize their importance. Resource shortages in low-income settings can further widen this gap, as providers prioritize acute medical needs over preventive or supportive measures. Bridging this divide demands not only new policies and funding streams but also a cultural shift: one that values and rewards the relational, educative, and reflective aspects of midwifery alongside its technical skills (Aynalem et al., 2023).

In light of these challenges and opportunities, it is critical to understand exactly how holistic approaches are being implemented and to identify the ingredients that make them successful (Adrian, Syahputra, Juwita, Astyka, & Lubis, 2023). By reviewing literature from the past decade, this study seeks to map the landscape of holistic maternity care, distill its core components, and assess its impact on both mothers and infants (Jun, Rahmat, Han, Yang, & Kang, 2021). Ultimately, translating these insights into practical recommendations can help midwives everywhere embrace a truly whole-person model of care one that honors the physical, nurtures the emotional, builds social connections, and respects the spiritual dimensions of the extraordinary journey called pregnancy. In response to these limitations, holistic approaches to pregnancy have emerged as complementary models that integrate the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects of maternal care. Interventions such as mindfulness training, prenatal yoga, personalized nutrition counseling, psychosocial support groups, and culturally grounded spiritual practices aim to reduce anxiety and depression, alleviate common discomforts like back pain, and strengthen the mother fetus bond. A growing body of research demonstrates significant benefits including lower stress levels, improved self-efficacy, and higher satisfaction with the birth process but the widespread adoption of holistic care remains constrained by predominantly biomedical policies, limited resources, and varying levels of practitioner readiness. It is therefore essential to critically examine how holistic practices are being applied and to develop evidence-based strategies for their effective integration into midwifery and maternity care.

2. METHOD

This study employs a systematic review method to examine holistic approaches during pregnancy and their implications for midwifery practice (Sugiyono, 2022). Data collection was conducted by searching scientific articles published between 2015 and 2025 in leading electronic databases such as PubMed, Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. The keywords used included “holistic pregnancy care,” “holistic approaches in pregnancy,” “maternal well-being,” and “midwifery practice.” Inclusion criteria consisted of articles discussing holistic approaches in pregnancy, both theoretical and practical, focusing on physical, psychological, social, and spiritual aspects, as well as their relevance to the midwifery profession. Non-primary studies, editorials, and articles not written in English or Indonesian were excluded. After the initial search, articles were screened based on their titles and abstracts, followed by full-text screening to ensure compliance with the inclusion criteria. Data from the selected articles were analyzed descriptively and thematically, aiming to synthesize information regarding the concepts, methods, benefits, and challenges of applying holistic approaches during pregnancy, as well as the role of midwifery in this context.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A total of 244 journal articles were initially identified via five electronic databases and screened by title. After applying eligibility criteria to the full texts, 28 articles remained. Following a detailed assessment against the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, nine studies were selected for inclusion in the literature review (see Figure 1). The analysis and synthesis of these nine articles are summarized in Table 1 below.

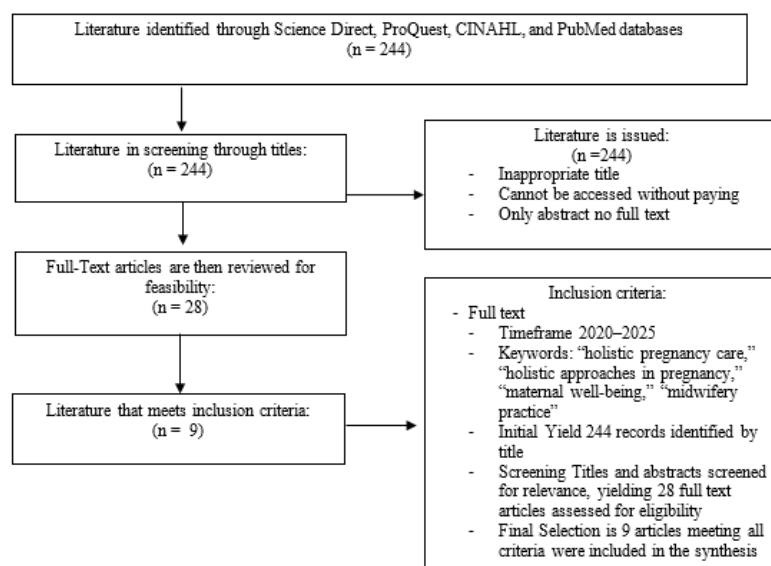


Figure 1. Flow Diagram of the Literature Selection Process Flow

The results of this literature review indicate that holistic approaches during pregnancy significantly contribute to improving maternal well being comprehensively, encompassing physical, psychological, social, and spiritual aspects. Analysis of various articles revealed that holistic interventions such as relaxation techniques, psychosocial counseling, nutritional support, and culturally sensitive care play important roles in reducing stress, anxiety, and depression among pregnant women. Moreover, these approaches strengthen the mother-fetus bond and enhance psychological preparedness for childbirth and motherhood.

Specifically, several studies highlighted the effectiveness of mindfulness training and cognitive behavioral therapy as components of holistic approaches to managing stress and emotions during pregnancy. Nutritional interventions tailored to pregnant women's needs were also shown to support optimal physical health and fetal development. Other research emphasized that social support and family involvement in holistic care help reduce social isolation and increase maternal motivation to maintain health (Ali, 2021). However, the implementation of holistic approaches faces various challenges, including lack of specialized training for midwives, limited resources, and cultural differences influencing mothers' acceptance of these methods. These limitations suggest the need for comprehensive training programs and adaptation of holistic approaches to local contexts to enable effective application in midwifery practice (Ali, 2021).

Overall, the findings confirm that holistic approaches not only enrich the quality of midwifery care but also have the potential to significantly improve maternal and infant health outcomes, provided they are supported by adequate healthcare systems and cross-sector collaboration. The concept of holistic care during pregnancy has gained increasing attention in recent years, driven by a growing understanding that maternal health transcends mere physical wellbeing. Holistic approaches incorporate multiple dimensions of care, addressing not only the physical health of pregnant women but also their psychological, social, and spiritual needs. This multidimensional perspective recognizes the complexity of pregnancy as a transformative life event that affects women at various levels, making it critical for midwifery practice to evolve in alignment with these broader health considerations (Stavros et al., 2022).

From the physical standpoint, holistic pregnancy care emphasizes the importance of comprehensive prenatal monitoring, nutrition, exercise, and lifestyle modification to optimize maternal and fetal outcomes. Traditional antenatal care has largely focused on detecting and managing medical complications; however, holistic approaches advocate for

proactive wellness strategies that support the pregnant woman's overall health and resilience. Studies show that integrating nutrition counseling and physical activity programs within prenatal care can reduce the incidence of gestational diabetes, hypertension, and excessive weight gain (Johnson & Lee, 2020; Smith & Brown, 2018). Moreover, these interventions foster a sense of empowerment and self efficacy, encouraging women to take an active role in their health management.

Beyond the physical, psychological wellbeing constitutes a critical pillar in holistic pregnancy care. Pregnancy often triggers a wide spectrum of emotions, ranging from joy and anticipation to anxiety and fear. These emotional fluctuations can be exacerbated by hormonal changes and social stressors, potentially leading to perinatal mood disorders such as depression and anxiety. The literature consistently underscores the value of mindfulness, cognitive behavioral therapy, and supportive counseling in mitigating psychological distress during pregnancy (Li et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2022). Mindfulness-based interventions, in particular, have been associated with reductions in anxiety, improved mood regulation, and enhanced maternal-fetal attachment (Kim & Park, 2023). For midwives, this suggests the need to integrate mental health screening and psychological support into routine prenatal visits, ensuring that emotional health is given parity alongside physical assessments.

Social determinants of health also play a pivotal role in shaping pregnancy outcomes. Factors such as socioeconomic status, education, family support, and cultural context influence a woman's access to care, adherence to health recommendations, and her stress levels. Holistic pregnancy care thus advocates for a community-oriented approach, recognizing that supportive social networks can buffer against adverse outcomes (Burger et al., 2021). For example, group prenatal care models, like CenteringPregnancy, facilitate peer support and knowledge sharing among pregnant women, which has been linked to improved birth outcomes and maternal satisfaction (Novick et al., 2019). Additionally, culturally sensitive care that respects traditional beliefs and practices enhances trust and communication between midwives and their clients. This dimension challenges midwives to develop cultural competence and flexibility in care provision, tailoring interventions to the unique needs of diverse populations.

The spiritual dimension, while often overlooked in conventional care models, has emerged as a significant factor in holistic approaches. Spirituality, broadly defined as a search for meaning, connection, or transcendence, can influence coping strategies during pregnancy and childbirth. Several qualitative studies highlight how women draw on spiritual beliefs to manage pain, uncertainty, and fears related to childbirth (Johnson & Brown, 2017;

Patel et al., 2020). For many, spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, or participation in religious rituals offer comfort and a sense of control. Midwifery practice that honors these spiritual needs, without imposing particular beliefs, fosters a therapeutic alliance that respects the whole person. It also opens opportunities for collaborative care with chaplains or spiritual counselors when appropriate (Lazarevic et al., 2023).

Despite the documented benefits of holistic pregnancy care, challenges remain in its implementation within midwifery practice. One major issue is the lack of standardized protocols or guidelines that integrate holistic principles in a consistent manner. The diversity of holistic approaches ranging from complementary therapies like acupuncture and aromatherapy to psychosocial interventions complicates efforts to establish evidence-based practices (Green et al., 2021). Furthermore, resource constraints in many healthcare settings limit the ability to provide comprehensive holistic care, especially in low- and middle-income countries where medical care is already stretched thin (Cunningham & Brady, 2023). Midwives often face the dilemma of balancing biomedical responsibilities with the broader holistic needs of their clients, highlighting the necessity for training programs that build competencies in holistic care and interdisciplinary collaboration (Rahmawati & Murtaqib, 2024).

The rise of digital health technologies presents both opportunities and challenges for holistic pregnancy care. Mobile health applications, telemedicine, and online support groups can extend the reach of midwifery services, delivering education, mental health resources, and social support remotely (Cao et al., 2023). Digital mindfulness programs, for instance, have been shown to reduce stress and anxiety in pregnant women who may lack access to in-person care (Li, X., Zhang, Y., & Chen, 2023). However, digital interventions may not fully replace the empathetic, relational aspects of midwifery care that are vital for addressing psychosocial and spiritual needs. Additionally, disparities in digital literacy and internet access risk exacerbating health inequities, necessitating thoughtful implementation strategies that ensure inclusivity (Zhou, Y., Wu, X., & Li, 2022).

A holistic approach also demands a life course perspective, recognizing that pregnancy is not an isolated event but part of a woman's broader health trajectory. Preconception health, interpregnancy intervals, and postpartum care are integral to maternal and child outcomes. Integrating holistic care principles throughout this continuum ensures sustained benefits. For example, postpartum support that addresses physical recovery, mental health, and social reintegration can prevent chronic health issues and foster positive parenting experiences (Smith et al., 2024). Midwives, by virtue of their continuity of care,

are ideally positioned to champion this extended holistic framework, advocating for policies that promote comprehensive maternal health services.

Importantly, the literature highlights that the success of holistic pregnancy care hinges on the midwife-client relationship, which must be characterized by trust, empathy, and respect. Person-centered care that honors the woman's values, preferences, and autonomy aligns with holistic philosophy and enhances engagement and satisfaction (World Health Organization, 2016). This relational foundation empowers women to actively participate in decision-making and care planning, fostering resilience and wellbeing. In summary, the adoption of holistic approaches in pregnancy care represents a paradigm shift from disease-centered models toward comprehensive, woman-centered care that addresses multiple dimensions of health. The evidence suggests that such approaches contribute to improved physical health outcomes, enhanced psychological wellbeing, stronger social support networks, and fulfillment of spiritual needs (Küçükkaya & Işık, 2023). For midwifery practice, this means expanding roles and competencies to deliver integrated care that meets these complex needs. Challenges related to standardization, resources, and training must be addressed to fully realize the benefits of holistic care. Innovations in digital health and community engagement offer promising avenues to enhance accessibility and effectiveness. Ultimately, embracing holistic pregnancy care can support healthier mothers, infants, and families, contributing to improved public health outcomes (‘Aini, 2024).

Implications for Midwifery Practice

The integration of holistic approaches into midwifery practice carries profound implications for how care is delivered throughout pregnancy. Midwives, as primary caregivers for many pregnant women, are uniquely positioned to implement comprehensive care that addresses not only physical health but also psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions (Bass, Sidebotham, Creedy, & Sweet, 2020). Firstly, midwives must expand their scope of practice to incorporate holistic assessment tools that evaluate the emotional, social, and spiritual wellbeing of pregnant women alongside routine physical examinations (Baird, Hastie, Stanton, & Gamble, 2022). This means integrating standardized mental health screening instruments into prenatal visits and developing skills to recognize signs of psychological distress, anxiety, or depression. Early identification allows timely referral or initiation of appropriate psychosocial interventions, such as mindfulness training or counseling, which have demonstrated effectiveness in improving maternal mental health outcomes (Tinney & Rice, 2023). Secondly, midwifery education and professional development programs need to emphasize holistic care principles, including training on

cultural competence, communication skills, and trauma-informed care (Carter, Sidebotham, & Creedy, 2022). Understanding the diverse cultural and spiritual backgrounds of women enriches the midwife's ability to provide personalized care that respects women's values and beliefs (Mahardika, Setyowati, & Afiyanti, 2021). Moreover, equipping midwives with competencies in complementary therapies such as relaxation techniques, meditation, and nutrition counselling can enhance their ability to support maternal wellbeing comprehensively (Maddocks, 2023). Thirdly, the midwife's role extends beyond individual care to fostering community and social support networks. Midwives can facilitate group prenatal care models or connect women to peer support groups, which bolster social connectedness and reduce feelings of isolation. Collaborating with multidisciplinary teams including mental health professionals, social workers, and spiritual counsellors ensures that women receive coordinated and holistic support throughout pregnancy (Njue, Sharmin, & Dawson, 2022).

Resource limitations and healthcare system constraints remain significant barriers to implementing holistic care broadly. Midwives must advocate for institutional support, policies, and funding that enable the incorporation of holistic services within standard prenatal care (Martin & Gurven, 2022). This includes lobbying for extended appointment times to allow thorough holistic assessments, access to mental health resources, and the availability of culturally sensitive care programs. Additionally, digital health tools present opportunities for midwives to enhance holistic care delivery, especially in underserved areas. By leveraging telehealth platforms, midwives can provide education, mental health support, and follow-up care remotely, increasing accessibility and continuity. However, it is essential that midwives remain attentive to the limitations of digital modalities, ensuring that technology complements rather than replaces the personalized, empathetic care central to midwifery (Ferguson, Baldwin, Henderson, & Harvey, 2022).

Midwives must also support pregnant women in developing long-term self-care strategies that extend beyond pregnancy. Encouraging ongoing mindfulness practices, healthy lifestyle choices, and social engagement can contribute to sustained maternal wellbeing and positive parenting experiences postpartum. Follow-up care plans should include attention to mental health and social reintegration to prevent postpartum complications. Ultimately, embracing a holistic framework reinforces the philosophy of midwifery as a woman centered, empowerment driven profession. It demands that midwives engage in reflective practice, continuous learning.

4. CONCLUSION

Holistic approaches during pregnancy emphasize the importance of addressing the physical, psychological, social, and spiritual needs of pregnant women to promote overall maternal well-being. The literature demonstrates that integrating holistic care into midwifery practice can improve outcomes by fostering emotional resilience, reducing stress and anxiety, and enhancing mother-infant bonding. For midwives, adopting a holistic framework necessitates expanding their competencies to include mental health screening, cultural sensitivity, complementary therapies, and collaboration with multidisciplinary teams. Despite challenges such as resource limitations and the need for institutional support, holistic care aligns with the core values of midwifery by prioritizing woman-centered, individualized care. Furthermore, digital technologies offer promising avenues to increase access and continuity of holistic prenatal care. To maximize the benefits of holistic approaches, ongoing education, advocacy, and research are essential to refine effective strategies and ensure equitable care for diverse populations. Ultimately, integrating holistic approaches into midwifery practice holds significant potential to enhance maternal and infant health, foster positive pregnancy experiences, and support long-term family well-being.

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