

## Check your understanding



**1** What is a skilled birth attendant (SBA)?

Answer

A skilled birth attendant is ideally someone with enough medical education and training to perform crucial interventions and medically support a birth, to significantly improve the health and survival of mother and infant. The WHO defined the term in 2004 as: "a midwife, doctor, or nurse who had been educated and trained to proficiency in the skills needed to manage normal (uncomplicated) pregnancies, childbirth, and the immediate postnatal period, and in the identification, management and referral of complications in women and newborns." The definition was updated in 2018 to include training and regulation with national standards and a list of expected skills.

**2** Why are SBAs being used as indicators for maternal health?

Answer

Because many health organizations and medical researchers realized that the presence of an SBA can drastically improve the survival and wellbeing of a mother and newborn and that the number of SBAs per pregnant woman can be an indicator of the state of maternal healthcare in a country. Maternal and infant death rates are still too high (about 295,000 women per year, and 2.5 million infants). More and better-skilled birth attendants can help bring these numbers down.

**3** How is using this indicator currently problematic, as our literature review showed?

Answer

As our review showed, there are far too many (over 100!) terms for SBAs worldwide. The wide range of terminology also comes with huge ranges in education level and training, and therefore with discrepancies in the level of competence that is needed for a skilled birth attendant to manage pregnancy and childbirth.

**4** How can the situation be improved?

Answer

To make sure that SBAs can do their job successfully, we need a more consistent definition of that job, and ways to determine and record who is able to perform this job and who isn't. We need to define how many years of education and training SBAs should receive, what should be part of that training, and what important medical procedures the SBAs need to perform. SBAs should be supervised, supported and regulated/certified to maintain their skills over time. Finally, we need many more (and ideally standardized) studies that help assess the numbers and competencies of SBAs worldwide.

**3** What do you think it means to "standardize studies"?

Answer

For studies to be comparable to each other, and also to just be plainly meaningful, there needs to be a uniformed standard for how information is collected. For instance, it is helpful to know where the study was done, for how long, with how many people, and at what geographical scope.