

Background

The postpartum period is an important period for improving maternal and child health. In many low-income countries, formal postpartum coverage is much lower than that of skilled delivery and antenatal care. Despite many studies exploring Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) involvement during pregnancy and delivery, little is known on TBAs roles during postpartum. Therefore, this study explores TBAs practices and perceptions on skilled postpartum care in rural, Tanzania.

Methods

Qualitative in-depth interviews data were collected from eight informal and three formal TBAs. Additionally, five multiparous women who were clients of informal TBAs were interviewed to triangulate information obtained from TBAs. Data were transcribed verbatim and open code program used for the coding process. Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse data.

Results

Our study found that, TBAs conduct close postpartum follow-ups, performing some rituals such as caring closely, cooking food and massaging women that were appreciated by women. They treat complications locally when they arise. In addition they perceive that, utilization of hospital-based postpartum service among women is only important for the baby and when complications which they cannot handle occur. TBAs are poorly linked to the health system and report lacking formal postpartum care training whereby their main source of knowledge is their parents and in-laws.

Conclusions

In this study TBAs practice rituals that could have been both positive and negative health implications, have negative perceptions to women use of formal postpartum care and have poor link to health system. The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and other stakeholders should increase awareness on the importance of postpartum care. The study is well linked to Complexity Science and People – Centred Systems as Integration of some beneficial rituals implemented by TBAs need to be considered. Improved collaboration between TBAs and formal health system would ensure continuity of care.