

A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD - TELEMEDICINE FOR MATERNAL CARE DURING COVID-19: FINDINGS FROM A GLOBAL MIXED METHODS STUDY OF HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

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Aim: The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a rapid and wide implementation of telemedicine for the provision of maternal and newborn healthcare. The aim of this study was to document the experiences of healthcare professionals globally with the provision of telemedicine for maternal and newborn healthcare during the pandemic. **Methods:** The second round of a global, online survey of maternal and newborn health professionals was conducted, disseminated in 11 languages. Data was collected between July 5 and September 10, 2020. The questionnaire included questions regarding background, preparedness and response to COVID-19 and experiences with providing telemedicine. Descriptive statistics and qualitative thematic analysis were used to analyse responses, disaggregated by country income level. **Results:** Responses from 1060 maternal and newborn health professional were analysed. Telemedicine was used by 58% of health professionals and two fifths of them reported not receiving guidelines on the provision of telemedicine. Key telemedicine practices included online birth preparedness classes, antenatal and postnatal care by video/phone, a COVID-19 helpline, and online psychosocial counselling. Challenges reported where technological, financial and language barriers, technological illiteracy, lack of nonverbal feedback, and distrust from patients. Telemedicine was considered as an important alternative to in-person consultations. However, health providers also emphasized the lower quality of care and risk of increasing the already existing inequalities in access to healthcare. **Conclusions:** Telemedicine has been applied globally to address disruptions of care provision during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, some crucial aspects of maternal and newborn healthcare seem difficult.