

**Title: Resilience in UK Midwifery: the importance of self-awareness and professional identity**

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ABSTRACT

*Background:* Midwifery is widely acknowledged as emotionally challenging work. Many midwives work in situations of adversity, with negative effects on wellbeing, morale and retention. However, not all midwives respond negatively to adversity. Some describe continued passion for their work, demonstrating resilience: the ability to respond positively and consistently to adversity.

*Aim:* To explore UK midwives' understanding and experience of resilience and identify factors involved in developing midwifery resiliency. This is the first study to focus directly on midwifery resilience.

*Method:* A self-selected sample of midwives was recruited via the UK Royal College of Midwives (RCM) journal. Inclusion criteria were: participants in clinical practice for 15 or more years and self-identifying as 'resilient'. A closed online discussion group was conducted between October-November 2012, facilitated by the research team. Eleven midwives actively participated in the discussions.

Qualitative data were analysed thematically using NVIVO. Study rigour was enhanced by independent cross-checking of coding, and an Expert Group consultation assisted data interpretation and concept modelling.

Ethical approval was obtained from School Research Ethics Committee at Cardiff University. Participation was voluntary. Participants received study information prior to consent and were guaranteed anonymity throughout.

*Key findings:* Four major themes were identified: Challenges to resilience; Managing and coping; Self-awareness and self-identity; Building resiliency. This paper focuses on Self-awareness and Self-identity, which featured strongly in the data. Participants perceived that resilience could be developed over time; key factors in building resiliency were 'knowing oneself' and having well-integrated professional and personal identities.

*Implications:* Insights from 'resilient' midwives indicate that it may be possible to develop educational and practice-based strategies to facilitate resiliency. This in turn should help midwives to manage the emotional demands of their work and may improve workforce retention. This has potential benefits for midwifery internationally.

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