

# Indigenous traditional midwife

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An indigenous traditional midwife is a person in an indigenous community who provides care for women before, during, and after pregnancy or childbirth. In these communities, a traditional midwife is the person who promotes the health of mothers and their offspring. In other words, traditional midwives are healthcare providers in the context of a particular traditional health system who are specialized in reproductive and often neonatal healthcare.

The word midwife was first documented in the 14th century according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary. The Google Dictionary explains the origin of the word as the combination of the preposition mid (with) and the word wife (in the archaic mean of woman). Therefore, the original meaning of midwife expresses the sense of someone who accompanies a woman.

On the other hand, the adjective traditional refers to the role of these practitioners as part of a traditional health system. These complex systems have been developed by human groups throughout history to guarantee health, they are part of these groups' culture and have mechanisms to pass from generation to generation.

The characteristics of these traditional practitioners vary from one culture to another although some common features exist. For example, their practice does not depend on receiving formal education from the Western health system, even when some traditional midwives can have received some Western-based training. The recognition of their role depends mainly on approval from their predecessors and trust from their communities. The mechanisms to transmit midwifery are also diverse, ranging from apprenticeship to revelation.

Although these practitioners are usually elderly women, in some cultures men perform this role also. Traditional midwives are customarily present in settings where traditional health systems persist; therefore, they are indicators of how strong the traditional culture of a human group is. Nowadays, with the globalization of the Western health system, traditional midwives are mostly relegated to rural and underserved areas, where they are the mainstay of maternal health promotion.