A STUDY TO UNDERSTANDING THE COMPETENCY OF AUXILIARY NURSE MIDWIVES IN IDENTIFYING AND RESPONDING TO ANTENATAL OBSTETRICAL EMERGENCIES IN VADODARA'S URBAN HEALTH CENTERS

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ABSTRACT

Background: Timely identification and management of antenatal obstetrical emergencies are essential to reducing maternal morbidity and mortality. Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs), as frontline providers in urban health centers, play a critical role in early detection and referral.

Objective: To assess the competency of ANMs in recognizing and responding to common antenatal emergencies in selected urban health centers of Vadodara city.

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 60 ANMs using a validated structured questionnaire and scenario-based assessment tool. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and chi-square tests to explore associations with demographic variables.

Results: Overall competency scores revealed that 40% of ANMs demonstrated moderate competency, 35% showed low competency, and only 25% achieved high competency. Significant associations were found between competency levels and years of experience ($p = 0.012$) and prior emergency training ($p = 0.003$).

Conclusion: The study highlights critical gaps in emergency preparedness among ANMs in urban settings. Regular, context-specific training and protocol reinforcement are recommended to enhance maternal care delivery.

Keywords: Antenatal emergencies, auxiliary nurse midwives, urban health centers, competency assessment, Vadodara

INTRODUCTION

Antenatal obstetrical emergencies—including antepartum hemorrhage, preeclampsia, eclampsia, and premature rupture of membranes (PROM)—remain leading contributors to maternal and perinatal morbidity and mortality in India.Antenatal obstetrical emergencies—including antepartum hemorrhage (APH), preeclampsia, eclampsia, and premature rupture of membranes (PROM)—remain among the leading causes of maternal morbidity and mortality in India. These conditions often present suddenly and require prompt recognition, stabilization, and referral to prevent adverse outcomes for both mother and fetus. According to the Sample Registration System (SRS, 2023), obstetric complications account for over 30% of maternal deaths nationally, with a disproportionate burden observed in urban low-resource settings.

In the context of urban primary healthcare, Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) serve as the first point of contact for pregnant women. Their role encompasses antenatal registration, routine check-ups, health education, and initial triage during complications. Given their proximity to the community and their position within the urban health infrastructure, ANMs are uniquely positioned to detect early warning signs and initiate timely referrals. However, their effectiveness in managing obstetrical emergencies is contingent upon adequate training, clinical exposure, and familiarity with emergency protocols.

Despite the existence of national frameworks such as the Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) program, LaQshya initiative, and Skilled Birth Attendant (SBA) guidelines, implementation at the urban primary care level remains inconsistent. Many ANMs receive limited structured exposure to emergency scenarios, and training modules often lack contextual relevance to the urban health center setting, where referral pathways, staffing patterns, and resource availability differ significantly from tertiary hospitals. This disconnect contributes to delays in emergency recognition, suboptimal initial management, and fragmented referral coordination.

Empirical evidence from states such as Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu has highlighted these challenges. Sharma and Thomas (2024) reported that only 38% of ANMs in urban slums could correctly identify signs of preeclampsia, and less than 25% were familiar with emergency documentation protocols. Similarly, Rajan and Menon (2023) found that ANMs in semi-urban Tamil Nadu struggled with decision-making during PROM cases due to lack of simulation-based training and unclear referral hierarchies.

In Gujarat, where urbanization is rapidly expanding and maternal health indicators vary across districts, understanding the competency of ANMs in antenatal emergency management is essential for strengthening primary-level maternal care. Vadodara city, with its network of urban health centers and diverse antenatal population, offers a relevant setting to explore these dynamics.

OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the knowledge and skills of ANMs in identifying antenatal obstetrical emergencies.
2. To evaluate their response strategies and referral practices.
3. To explore associations between competency levels and demographic variables such as experience, education, and prior training.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design and Setting

This study employed a descriptive cross-sectional design to assess the competency of Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) in identifying and responding to antenatal obstetrical emergencies. The research was conducted across 10 urban health centers in Vadodara city, Gujarat, selected purposively based on their antenatal caseload volume, geographical distribution, and staffing availability. These centers represent the primary interface between urban communities and maternal health services, making them ideal for evaluating frontline emergency preparedness.

Sample Size and Sampling TechniqueA total of 60 ANMs were recruited using purposive sampling, ensuring that participants met specific inclusion criteria aligned with the study objectives. The sample size was determined based on feasibility, expected variability in competency levels, and the need for representation across multiple urban health centers.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Minimum **one year of continuous service** in maternal health
- Currently **posted in urban health centers** within Vadodara city
- Willingness to participate and provide **written informed consent**

Exclusion Criteria:

- ANMs on administrative duty or extended leave during the study period
- Prior participation in similar competency assessments within the last six months

Data Collection Tools and Validation

- Competency was assessed using a structured questionnaire and a scenario-based assessment tool, developed specifically for this study to evaluate practical and theoretical understanding across five key domains:

1. **Emergency identification** (e.g., signs of APH, preeclampsia, PROM)
2. **Initial management steps** (e.g., stabilization, medication initiation)
3. **Referral decision-making** (e.g., urgency, transport coordination)
4. **Use of emergency kits** (e.g., availability, correct utilization)
5. **Communication and documentation** (e.g., referral notes, verbal handover)

The tools were reviewed by a panel of experts in maternal health, nursing education, and public health to ensure **content validity**. A pilot test was conducted with 10 ANMs from non-participating centers to refine clarity and relevance. **Reliability testing** yielded a **Cronbach's alpha of 0.82**, indicating high internal consistency.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was carried out over a two-week period, with each ANM completing the questionnaire and scenario-based assessment in a supervised setting to ensure standardization. Responses were scored using a pre-defined rubric and categorized into three competency levels:

- **Low competency**: Score range 0–10
- **Moderate competency**: Score range 11–15
- **High competency**: Score range 16–20

Participants were also asked to provide demographic information, including age, education, years of experience, and prior emergency training exposure.

RESULTS

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participants (n = 60)**

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age Group	25–35 years	38	63.3
	36–45 years	14	23.3
	>45 years	8	13.4
Educational Qualification	ANM Diploma	54	90.0
	GNM/B.Sc. Nursing	6	10.0
Years of Experience	≤5 years	28	46.7
	>5 years	32	53.3
Prior Emergency Training	Yes	18	30.0
	No	42	70.0

The demographic profile indicates that the majority of participating ANMs (63.3%) were in the 25–35 years age group, representing a relatively young and potentially adaptable workforce. A smaller proportion (23.3%) were aged 36–45 years, while 13.4% were above 45 years, suggesting a mix of early-career and more experienced practitioners.In terms of educational background, 90% of participants held an ANM diploma, which is the standard qualification for this cadre, while 10% had pursued higher nursing qualifications such as GNM or B.Sc. Nursing. This reflects the staffing norms in urban health centers, where ANM diploma holders form the backbone of maternal health service delivery.Regarding professional experience, slightly more than half (53.3%) had over five years of service, indicating a substantial proportion with extensive field exposure. The remaining 46.7% had five years or less, representing a group that may particularly benefit from targeted skill enhancement.

Notably, only 30% of ANMs reported having received prior emergency obstetric training, leaving a significant 70% without formal exposure to structured emergency preparedness programs. This gap underscores the importance of competency-based, context-specific training interventions to strengthen frontline maternal care.

Table 2: Competency Levels of ANMs in Managing Antenatal Obstetrical Emergencies (n = 60)

Competency Category	Score Range	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Low	0–10	21	35.0
Moderate	11–15	24	40.0
High	16–20	15	25.0

Distribution of ANMs' Competency Levels in Antenatal Obstetrical Emergencies
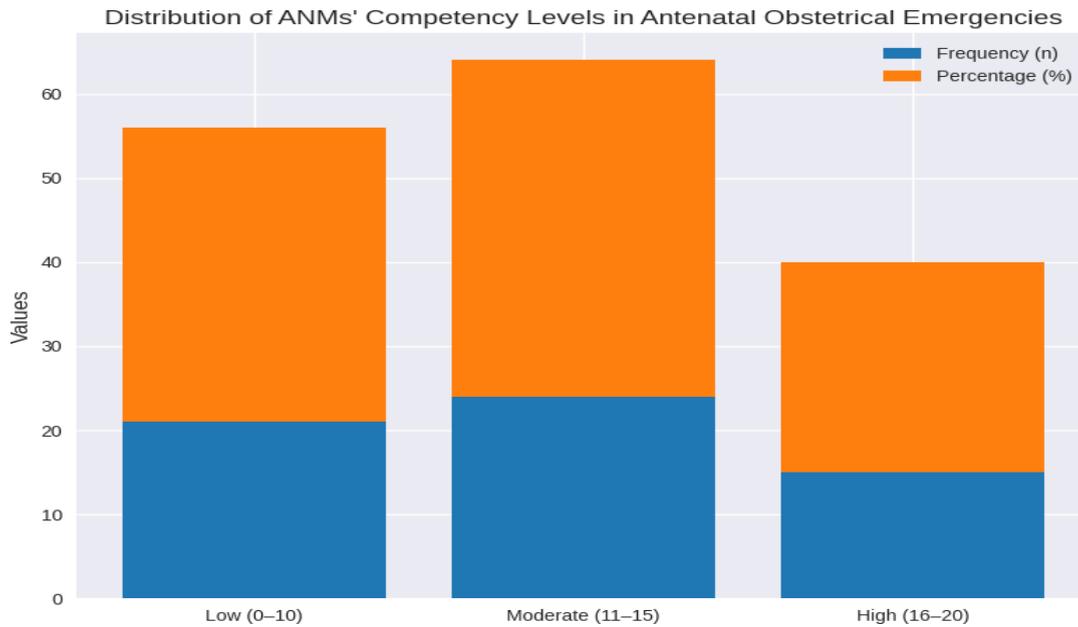
The competency assessment revealed that only one-quarter (25%) of the participating ANMs achieved a high competency level in identifying and responding to antenatal obstetrical emergencies. The majority fell into the moderate (40%) or low (35%) categories, indicating substantial scope for improvement in both knowledge and practical skills.

Participants in the low competency group frequently demonstrated gaps in:

- Early recognition of preeclampsia and antepartum hemorrhage
- Correct sequence of initial management steps
- Appropriate and timely referral decision-making

The moderate competency group generally performed well in recognizing common emergencies but showed inconsistencies in protocol adherence and documentation standards.

The high competency group displayed strong performance across all domains, particularly in simulation-based scenario responses, suggesting that prior exposure to structured training or extensive field experience may have contributed to their proficiency.

These findings align with earlier studies (e.g., Sharma & Thomas, 2024; Rajan & Menon, 2023) that highlight variability in emergency preparedness among frontline maternal health workers, and they reinforce the need for targeted, context-specific training interventions to elevate overall competency levels.

Table 3: Associations Between Selected Variables and Competency Levels of ANMs (n = 60)

Variable	p-value	Statistical Significance	Interpretation
Years of Experience	0.012	Significant	ANMs with more than 5 years of service demonstrated higher competency scores compared to those with less experience.

Variable	p-value	Statistical Significance	Interpretation
Prior Emergency Training	0.003	Highly Significant	ANMs who had undergone prior emergency obstetric training showed markedly better competency levels.
Education Level	0.087	Not Significant	No statistically significant difference in competency was observed between ANM diploma holders and those with higher nursing qualifications.

The analysis revealed that **years of professional experience** and **prior exposure to emergency obstetric training** were significantly associated with higher competency levels among ANMs.

➢ **Years of Experience (p = 0.012):**
ANMs with more than five years of service were more likely to achieve moderate to high competency scores. This suggests that practical exposure and accumulated clinical enco**unters** contribute to improved recognition and management of antenatal emergencies.

➢ **Prior Emergency Training (p = 0.003):**
This variable showed the strongest association with competency. ANMs who had attended structured emergency obstetric training—whether through workshops, simulation sessions, or in-service programs—demonstrated greater accuracy in emergency identification, adherence to protocols, and confidence in referral decision-making. This finding reinforces the value of refresher courses and layered learning approaches in sustaining clinical readiness.

➢ **Education Level (p = 0.087):**
No statistically significant association was found between formal educational qualification and competency level. This may indicate that practical, context-specific training has a greater influence on emergency preparedness than baseline academic credentials alone.

DISCUSSION

The present study assessed the competency of Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) in identifying and responding to antenatal obstetrical emergencies within urban health centers of Vadodara city. The findings revealed that the majority of participants demonstrated moderate to low competency, with only one-quarter (25%) achieving high scores. This competency gap is particularly concerning given the critical role ANMs play as first-contact providers in urban maternal health services, where timely recognition and management of emergencies can be life-saving.The most prominent deficiencies were observed in early recognition of preeclampsia, appropriate utilization of emergency kits, and timely referral decision-making. These gaps mirror the findings of Rajan and Menon (2023), who reported similar challenges among ANMs in Tamil Nadu, attributing them to limited exposure to structured, context-sensitive training and inadequate simulation-based practice. The present study reinforces the argument that competency is not solely a function of theoretical knowledge, but also of practical preparedness and familiarity with local protocols.The analysis further revealed significant associations between competency levels and both years of experience (p = 0.012) and prior emergency training (p = 0.003). This suggests that layered learning approaches—where foundational training is periodically reinforced through refresher modules—can substantially enhance emergency preparedness. Experienced ANMs may benefit from cumulative clinical exposure, while those with

prior training likely possess a stronger cognitive framework for integrating new knowledge. These findings align with Bakshi et al. (2024), who demonstrated that repeated, scenario-based training improves both retention and application of emergency management skills.Interestingly, education level did not show a statistically significant association with competency (p = 0.087). This may reflect the limitations of diploma-level curricula in adequately covering obstetrical emergency scenarios, as well as the fact that formal qualifications do not guarantee practical readiness. Similar observations have been made by Sharma and Thomas (2024), who emphasized the need for competency-based continuing education regardless of baseline academic attainment.Qualitative feedback from participants provided valuable insights into the lived realities of ANMs in urban health centers. Many expressed feeling underprepared for high-stakes emergencies and voiced a strong preference for simulation-based workshops, protocol reinforcement sessions, and hands-on skill drills. This aligns with constructivist learning theory, which posits that active, experiential learning fosters deeper understanding and confidence compared to passive instruction.

From a policy perspective, these findings underscore the importance of integrating structured, context-specific emergency training into routine in-service education for ANMs. Such training should be aligned with national guidelines under the Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) program and the LaQshya initiative, but adapted to the unique operational realities of urban primary care settings—where referral pathways, resource availability, and patient demographics differ from rural or tertiary contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study identified substantial competency gaps among Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) working in Vadodara's urban health centers in the identification and management of antenatal obstetrical emergencies. With only one-quarter of participants achieving high competency scores, the findings underscore the urgent need for capacity-building interventions that go beyond routine in-service lectures.The results demonstrate that years of experience and prior emergency training are significant predictors of higher competency, highlighting the value of layered learning approaches and periodic refresher modules. Conversely, the absence of a significant association with formal educational level suggests that practical, context-specific skill development is more influential than baseline qualifications in preparing ANMs for high-stakes clinical situations.Integrating regular, contextualized training—incorporating simulation exercises, case-based discussions, and referral protocol reinforcement—into the continuing education framework for ANMs can strengthen their readiness to respond effectively to emergencies. Such interventions should be aligned with national maternal health initiatives like the Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) program and the LaQshya initiative, but adapted to the operational realities of urban primary care.

By addressing these competency gaps, health systems can enhance timely recognition, appropriate initial management, and efficient referral of antenatal emergencies, ultimately contributing to improved maternal health outcomes and advancing India's progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being).

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