

# A qualitative study of obstetric violence in Western Switzerland.

## Midwifery students report their representations and needs regarding “Obstetric violence”

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### Background

Though considered controversial by some healthcare professionals, Obstetric Violence (OV) has become an international preoccupation first raised by feminist activists in South America.<sup>1</sup> OV or mistreatments are considered as an expression of gender-based violence.<sup>2</sup> OV has impacts on the physical and mental health of women and infants.<sup>3</sup> OV also impacts on midwives' experience and undermine their professional motivation.<sup>2</sup> The WHO hence declared that OV violates women's fundamental human rights.<sup>4</sup>

Several research teams have attempted to define obstetric violence or mistreatments during childbirth resulting in the identification of several dimensions of such violence: medical acts, lack of consent and privacy, and physical and verbal abuse.<sup>3</sup> Practices that are not sustained by evidence such as the Kristeller manoeuvre or frequent episiotomies are often named as emblematic examples of OV. Similarly, breaches in the rights of mothers especially concerning consent are frequently mentioned in the literature.<sup>5</sup> Thus, OV is a topic of utter interest for midwives and student midwives.<sup>6</sup>

### Aim

The research project aimed to identify how midwifery students perceive and respond to the issue of OV. And it aimed to understand how OV intervened in midwifery students' motivation and training process.

### Methods

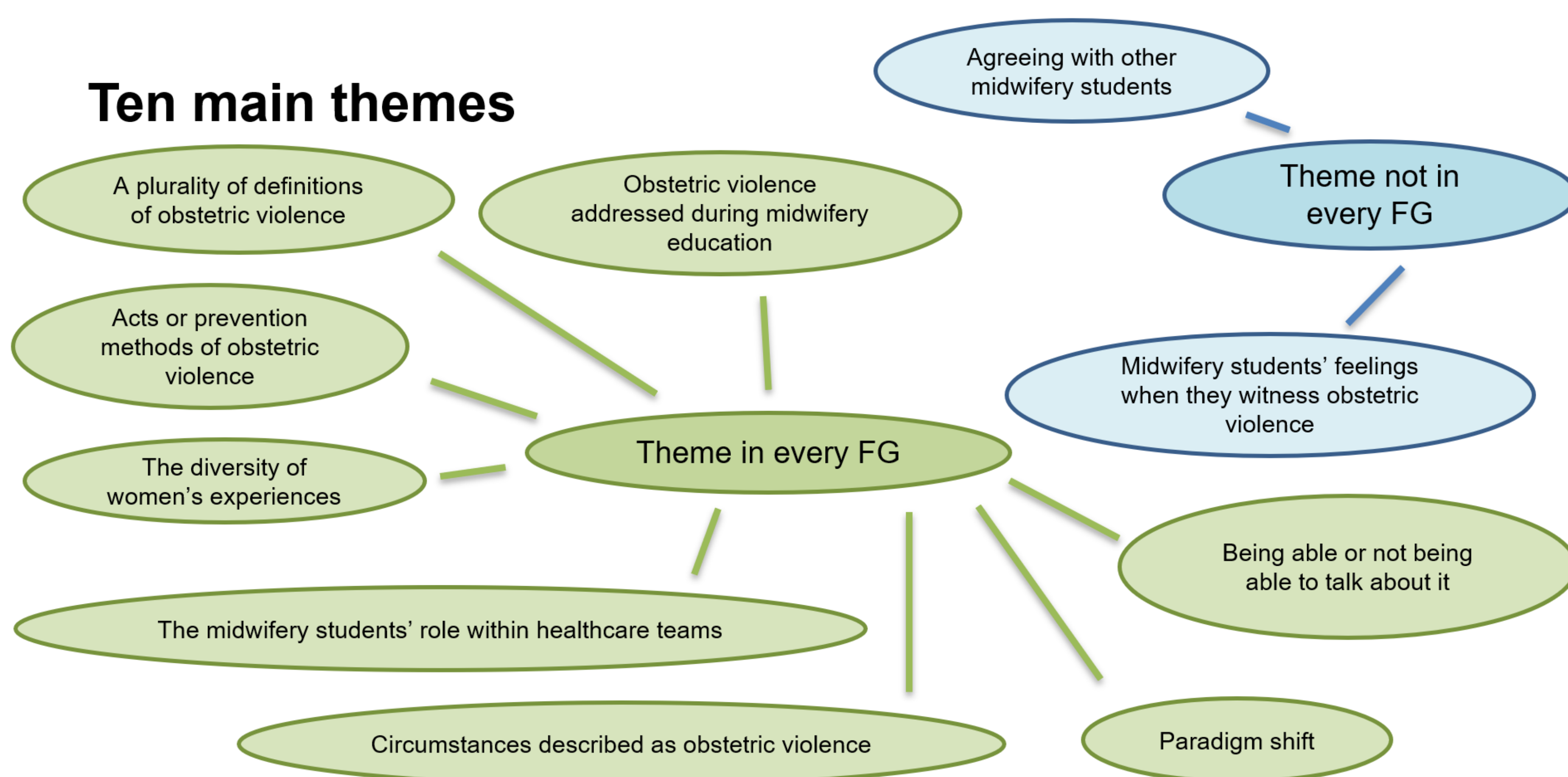
An explorative qualitative approach through three semi-structured focus groups (FG) (11 participants, via videoconference). Midwifery students from the French-speaking part of Switzerland were recruited (inclusion criteria: at least one internship in the labor ward; exclusion criteria: students without practical experience and interrupted (for instance for sick-leave) or failed studies. Emotional support was offered to participants if necessary.

The data analysis was based on the six phases of the reflexive inductive thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2022).<sup>7</sup>

The study obtained ethical approval in MHH. As the study was focused on students' representations and not experiences, the CER-VD (Swissethics) declared that it was out of its jurisdiction.

### Results

#### Ten main themes



*"It's important to keep up to date with today's best practices, what is recommended today, and it's important to get constructive feedback and to keep improving [...]." (Focus group 2, Participant 5, last year, direct entry)*  
*"To explain all the possible scenarios in childbirth. This allows the person to have all the elements in hand, and even, well, yes, there are complex situations, the person can, I can say something, or at that point, I can express myself or not, [...]." (Focus group 3, Participant 10, last year, secondary entry)*

*"It's very subjective. Maybe something will be experienced as violent by one woman and absolutely not by another. So, you really need to bear in mind that not everyone experiences violence in the same way and always question that." (Focus group 1, Participant 4, first year, secondary entry)*

*"It would be interesting to do it in the first year of training so that we know what obstetric violence means so that when we are immediately exposed to it in the delivery room or elsewhere during our training, we can know that it goes beyond normal or abnormal." (Focus group 2, Participant 5, first year, direct entry)*

*"[...] To have done a specific course on this for us, to give us the keys to be able to tackle these subjects, with the victim as well as with the person who is at the root of the violence." (Focus group 1, Participant 4, first year, direct entry)*

*"I don't know if I'd dare talk about it in any case because I'd be afraid of the repercussions, already as a student, on my placement and internship results." (Focus group 3, Participant 11, first year, secondary entry)*

*"For me, that would be any act or word, well, any act committed without the woman's consent." (Focus group 2, Participant 6, last year, direct entry)*

### Conclusion

Despite the presence of controversy concerning the presence and the name of OV, the participants considered OV to be a reality in their field of practice. Midwifery students found it easier to discuss OV at school than in their practical placements, fearing for their evaluation. The participants claimed for more courses to learn how to deal with this sensitive issue.

The results allowed the identification of two main issues worth investigating in further studies: how to accompany midwifery students when they witness OV and the teaching needed to form professionals who are aware of OV and can deal with it through the prevention and an adequate reaction in case of OV detection.

<sup>1</sup> Ferrão, A. C., Sim-Sim, M., Almeida, V. S. & Zangão, M. O. (2022). Analysis of the Concept of Obstetric Violence: Scoping Review Protocol. *Journal of Personalized Medicine*, 12(7), 1090. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jpm1201090> <sup>2</sup> Sadler, M., Santos, M. J., Ruiz-Berdún, D., Rojas, G. L., Skoko, E., Gillen, P. & Clausen, J. A. (2016). Moving beyond disrespect and abuse: Addressing the structural dimensions of obstetric violence. *Reproductive Health Matters*, 24(47), 47–55. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rhm.2016.04.002> <sup>3</sup> Jardim, D. M. B. & Modena, C. M. (2018). Obstetric violence in the daily routine of care and its characteristics. *Revista Latino-Americana de Enfermagem*, 26(0). <https://doi.org/10.1590/1518-8345.2450.3069> <sup>4</sup> World Health Organization. (2014). *The prevention and elimination of disrespect and abuse during facility-based childbirth*. [https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/134588/WHO\\_RHR\\_14.23\\_eng.pdf](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/134588/WHO_RHR_14.23_eng.pdf) <sup>5</sup> Bohren, M. A., Vogel, J. P., Hunter, E. C., Lutsiv, O., Makh, S. K., Souza, J. P., et al. (2015). The Mistreatment of Women during Childbirth in Health Facilities Globally: A Mixed-Methods Systematic Review. *PLOS Medicine*, 12(6), e1001847. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1001847> <sup>6</sup> Mena-Tudela, D., Roman, P., González-Chordá, V. M., Rodríguez-Arrastia, M., Gutiérrez-Cascajares, L. & Ropero-Padilla, C. (2023). Experiences with obstetric violence among healthcare professionals and students in Spain: A constructivist grounded theory study. *Women and Birth*, 36(2), e219–e226. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wombi.2022.07.169> <sup>7</sup> Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. London: SAGE.