

## Abstract

- Title:** "To the best of your knowledge and for the good of your neighbor".  
A study of urban traditional birth attendants in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- Language:** English
- Keywords:** Traditional birth attendants, childbirth, knowledge, change, health care system, ethnography, Ethiopia
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The present thesis is a study of a group of traditional birth attendants (TBA) in an urban context in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The purpose of the study is threefold and aims at; describing the role, function, knowledge and practice of urban TBAs in Addis Ababa; describing how knowledge is constituted, transmitted and established within this group and describing the informal health system that constitutes the working reality of the TBAs in a transitional rural to urban society and how change takes place within that system.

The theoretical framework derives from an interpretative interactionist perspective and relates to medical anthropology and studies in education with a focus on culture, enculturation and knowledge. The study employs a descriptive design based in the ethnographic tradition. The empirical data was obtained through a ten months field study, which encompassed ethnographic interviews, observations, and focus group discussions with different groups of informants. The key informant group consisted of twelve women currently working as TBAs in the area. Eight of these were untrained and four had a one-month TBA training course some eight years ago. In addition to this group, six trained TBAs (TTBAs) employed in the primary health care system, six young mothers, and nine grand mothers participated in the study. Observations took place in the TBA's every-day life situation, in health education situations, and in a public maternity clinic. Data was analyzed using a constant comparative method and resulted in themes and sub-themes concerning three main issues in the TBAs working context; becoming and being a TBA, pregnancy and birth; and changing working conditions.

The study shows that the TBAs motives for becoming and being a TBA is determined by their perception of responsibility towards their kin and their knowledge. In the birth event the TBA is seen to assist Maryam (Virgin Mary) in her delivery and detachment of mother and child. Her knowledge and practice in pregnancy and childbirth is influenced by different knowledge systems. It is to a large extent based in general cultural and religious norms and structures but includes to varying degrees also knowledge, practices, and symbols from the modern biomedical knowledge system. This together with the fact that all the TBAs turn to the professional health system for assistance with cases perceived as above their ability, indicate that they are in fact, although not recognized as such, also part of that system. The time-wise relatively short period of involvement with the birthing woman, indicates however, that the TBA's ability to negotiate change and influence the outcome of birth is limited. Changes in their practice and knowledge takes place through an accommodation to changing circumstances in society in general and in the care of birthing women in particular. Changes in primary health care policy which have brought competition by young newly trained birth attendants, the increasing risk of contracting HIV/AIDS through their job, and the devaluation of traditional customs were found to be important forces in the choice of change and continuity.

These findings are discussed in a wider perspective of knowledge transformation, cultural competence, management of health education programs and poverty reduction.