

The midwife’s experience in mantaining the psychoneuroendocrine balance of women in labour during the COVID-19 pandemic: a phenomenological study

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Objective. Neurohormonal processes control both the physiological aspects of labor and childbirth, and contribute to the subjective psychological experiences of birth. This concept has always been underestimated in clinical practice and this became even more glaring during the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim of the study was to analyze through the experience of midwives, how they, during the pandemic, have contributed to influence and maintain the balance of the psycho-neuro-endocrine axis (PNEI).

Materials and Methods. A qualitative research study, based on the phenomenological method of Cohen on a sample of midwives from the A.O.U.I Policlinico of Bari, interviewed in September 2021.

Results. Four main themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews and “field notes”: “Woman Care”, “Loneliness and Fear”, “Mask and DPI”, and finally “COVID and Contagion”. In addition, eleven subthemes were derived from these as can be seen in the table (Table 1). The results of the analysis showed how midwives, who have always been the main reference figures for women, newborns and couples, have worked tirelessly to ensure that women received the best possible care, covid positive or not, aware of the influence that the psycho-physical component has on the hormonal release that guides the course of the birth event.

Conclusions. As the pandemic continues, there is an urgent need to improve the care and promote a physiological birth since it is known that giving birth physiologically is a psychologically powerful experience. From this emerges the need for health care providers to become aware of the importance of maintaining the psychoneuroendocrine balance to allow women to have the most positive birth experience possible.

Table 1.

THEMES	SUBTHEMES
1 Woman care	1.1 Setup: White Zone vs Red Zone 1.2 Methods and Strategies 1.3 One to One Care
2 Loneliness and Fear	2.1 Absence vs Connexion 2.2 Being born in a video call
3 Mask and DPI	3.1 Barriers 3.2 Protection vs Well-being 3.3 Discomfort
4 Covid & Contagion	4.1 Bringing the virus home 4.2 Covid and Professional Impact 4.3 Physical impact