

## Advanced maternal age in women admitted for labour care to a midwifery unit: a national cohort study using UKMidSS

### Background

In the UK and in other developed countries maternal age at birth has been increasing for at least the past 30 years.<sup>1</sup> In England and Wales in 2020, 24% of births were to women aged 35 or over, with 5% to women aged 40 or over, compared with 8% and 1% respectively in 1988.<sup>1</sup> Increasing maternal age is associated with a range of pregnancy complications, interventions and adverse outcomes including diabetes, hypertension,<sup>2</sup> Caesarean section,<sup>3,4</sup> stillbirth and neonatal death.<sup>5</sup> As a consequence, UK guidance about planning place of birth advises that women aged over 35 at booking should have an individual assessment to consider their suitability for planning birth in a midwifery-led setting. There is less evidence about the risks associated with increasing maternal age for women who are otherwise healthy with straightforward pregnancies,<sup>6</sup> but, at least for women in this group who are aged 35-40, the likelihood of intrapartum interventions and adverse outcomes requiring obstetric care appears to increase with increasing age.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, there is still a significant benefit for these women associated with planning birth in a midwifery-led setting, in terms of reduced likelihood of intervention and adverse outcome.<sup>7</sup> In a recent survey of midwifery unit admission criteria, 64% of local midwifery unit admission guidelines indicated that women aged 35-40 years were explicitly eligible for midwifery unit birth.<sup>8</sup> Evidence about the risks and benefits of midwifery unit care for women aged over 40 is lacking, and it is not known how many women aged over 40 are admitted to midwifery units for labour care.<sup>7</sup>

### Objective

To use the UK Midwifery Study System (UKMidSS) to carry out a national cohort study to estimate the proportion of women admitted to midwifery units for labour care in the UK who were aged over 40 when giving birth, and describe and compare labour care, management and outcomes with other women admitted to midwifery units.

### Research questions

- What is the prevalence of advanced maternal age (AMA), defined as 41 years or older when giving birth, in women admitted to UK midwifery units for labour care?
- What are the characteristics of women of AMA, admitted to midwifery units for labour care?
- How is the labour care of women of AMA managed in midwifery units?
- What are the outcomes for women of AMA admitted to midwifery units for labour care, and their babies, compared with other women admitted to midwifery units?

### Study period

1<sup>st</sup> February 2023 – 31<sup>st</sup> January 2024

### Case definition

Any woman of advanced maternal age and admitted for labour care to a midwifery unit.

### Funding

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## References

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