Chapter 2
Exploring the Use of Indigenous Languages in Antenatal Care Sessions Among Mothers in Lagos State

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the use of indigenous languages during antenatal care (ANC) sessions among mothers in Lagos state. Authors investigate factors that influence the use of indigenous languages, the most preferred mode of presentation, and how the languages affect reception, participation, and knowledge of mothers on safe motherhood practices. Using in-depth interviews with nurses and observations during the ANC sessions, the study found that indigenous languages engender participation and are effective in building self-esteem, trust, and confidence of mothers. Songs in the indigenous language, particularly Yoruba language, help mothers retain and recall safe motherhood messages easily. Mothers generally demonstrate their understanding during the question and answer sessions, while also serving as agents of information reinforcement among themselves using indigenous languages. In view of the occasional need for interpreters, the study recommends that health workers should be encouraged to take courses in indigenous languages within their region as a second language.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990’s, Nigeria has made efforts and recorded some progress at reducing maternal and child mortality. Nigeria’s Maternal Mortality Ratio dropped from 1,200 deaths in 1990 to 540 deaths in 2013 per 100,000 live births. Similarly, under five Mortality Rate dropped from 191 deaths in 1990 to 94 deaths in 2012 per 1,000 live births. Despite this progress, Nigeria still occupies the unenviable position as a leading contributor to the regional and global burden of women and children’s death. Furthermore, child survival in Nigeria is threatened largely by nutritional deficiencies and illnesses, particularly malaria, diarrheal diseases, acute respiratory infections (ARI), and vaccine-preventable diseases (VPD), which account for the majority of morbidity and mortality in childhood (Society for Family Health, 2019).

In its bid to address this challenge, the Lagos State Government in 2008 inaugurated a committee to offer technical guidance on the various modalities needed for the reduction of the maternal mortality. The committee recommended a 5-year work-plan developed for the implementation of the Maternal and Child Mortality Reduction Programme (MCMR) to reduce the maternal and child mortality rates in line with the United Nations Millennium Development Goals 4, 5 and 6. An earlier study in the state gave the maternal mortality ratio in Lagos State as 555/100,000 live births. This figure was higher than the national average of 545/100,000 live births (Lagos State Ministry of Health, 2017). Hence, critical to safe motherhood is effective health communication, particularly during antenatal care sessions.

According to the World Health Organisation (2016), antenatal care (ANC) is the care provided by skilled health-care professionals to pregnant women and adolescent girls in order to ensure the best health conditions for both mother and baby during pregnancy. At the ANC, pregnant women want to have a “positive pregnancy experience”. A positive pregnancy experience is defined as maintaining physical and sociocultural normality; maintaining a healthy pregnancy for mother and baby (including preventing and treating risks, illness and death); having an effective transition to positive labour and birth; and achieving positive motherhood (including maternal self-esteem, competence and autonomy). To achieve these, the midwives check the health of the pregnant mother and the baby; give the pregnant mother useful information to help her have a healthy pregnancy, including advice about healthy eating and exercise; discuss options and choices for care during pregnancy, labour and birth; and answer any other question which the pregnant mother may have. Thus, the components of ANC include risk identification; prevention and management of pregnancy-related or concurrent diseases; and health education and health promotion. (WHO, 2016; NHS, 2017)
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