Chapter 4

Indigenous Language Media and Safe Motherhood Practices

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ABSTRACT

The chapter focuses on safe motherhood practices in Africa and how indigenous language media can be utilized to achieve the prevalence of safe maternal health. While highlighting the deplorable state of maternal health in Africa, the chapter recognized that to a large extent the success of safe motherhood initiative depends on effective communication. It reiterated the fact that communication is said to have taken place only when the sender and receiver have understood each other, and in this case indigenous language appears to be the right fit for the less literate mothers in communicating the message of safe motherhood practice. The chapter adopted the health belief model to drive its point home while recommending intense government action to achieve safe maternal health. It concluded by adjudging indigenous language an effective means of achieving the goals of safe motherhood initiative.

INTRODUCTION

The safety and care of child-bearing women all over the world is currently a top priority focus of governments globally. This makes it a critical agenda in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5). Excellent safe motherhood practice has grown to become one of the globally accepted and coveted indices of development. The reason behind this development trend is not far-fetched. Ikhioya (2014) notes that nearly 600,000 women between the ages of 15 and 49 years die every year globally as a result of complications arising from pregnancy and

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childbirth. More than half a million women and girls die each year as a result of pregnancy, childbirth, and related complications (United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), 2016; World Health Organization (WHO, 2010). A recent report on maternal mortality, jointly released by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group and the United Nations Population Division, estimates a worldwide number of 295,000 maternal deaths in 2017. This figure represents a 38% reduction since the year 2000 an average reduction of just fewer than 3% per year. For women, this means that the global lifetime risk of maternal mortality – the risk that a 15-year old girl will die eventually from a maternal cause – was approximately 1 in 190 for 2017, nearly half of the level of risk in 2000 (WHO 2019).

Even though, the United Nations International Children Emergency Funds (UNICEF, 2015), reported that from 1990 to 2015, the global maternal mortality ratio declined by 44 per cent – from 385 deaths to 216 deaths per 100,000 live births, according to UN inter-agency estimates, it is still less than half the 5.5 per cent annual rate needed to achieve the three-quarters reduction in maternal mortality targeted for 2015 in Millennium Development Goal 5. More worrisome is the report from International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF, 2019) that every day some 830 women die from causes related to pregnancy or childbirth. Many more have serious injuries or long-lasting consequences. Going further, reports from Society for Family Health (2019) confirms these worrisome statistics by holding that high unmet need for family planning contributes to maternal death as women are exposed to pregnancies:

- Too soon (early onset / adolescent pregnancy);
- Too frequent (lack of spacing)
- Too many (several children) and
- Too late (pregnancies in women of older age)

According to reports from WHO (2012) about 800,000 women in Nigeria are living with Vesico-Vagina Fistula (VVF), a disabling condition often caused by problems in childbirth; the number grows by 20,000 each year. While in Tanzania, about 9,000 women die annually of complications related to pregnancy. The country’s maternal health facilities are often too far away and the women lack adequate transport.

The sad part of this unfortunate development is that maternal mortality can be avoided if concerted efforts are made by all including the woman, the man, the community and government. Nwokocha (2008) cited in Olonade, Alabi, and Imhonopi (2019) reechoed this fact by holding that maternal mortality, known to be the loss of lives of women in their maternity stage due to pregnancy complication, is classified among preventable deaths. Thus, it is more of negligence and the non-application of the right attitude towards maternal health that results to maternal mortality.
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