



Exploring news sources of information on maternal health among pregnant women in Nigeria

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Abstract

Maternal health care is one of the most critical areas of public health that needs attention and effective coverage by the mass media. However, in Nigeria, most women do not have access to information on maternal health from the mass media. This study therefore used a qualitative method for data collection through focus group discussion to explore news sources of information on maternal health among pregnant women. The study focuses on the phenomenological approach to discuss and understand the lived experiences of the informants and make meanings out of what they describe of the phenomenon. Fifteen pregnant women in Tudun Wada, Sabon Gari and Unguwar Sunusi communities all in Kaduna metropolis Nigeria were purposely selected as informants in the study. The findings revealed that most pregnant women get information on maternal health from health workers, traditional birth attendants, relatives, friends and other lactating women. It is also established that despite the numerous radio and television broadcast stations in Kaduna metropolis Nigeria few carry programmes on maternal health. Mostly health programmes are on general health and not specific to maternal health. The study concludes that the absence of health programme targeting exclusively pregnant women in both English and local languages contribute to lack of awareness of health benefits of attending ante natal clinics among pregnant women. The paper, therefore, recommends the introduction of maternal health programmes in both English and local languages in all mass media organisations to create awareness of the maternal health problems and for safe deliveries of pregnant women. There should also be a weekly live-phone-in programme on maternal health. The state government to also conduct training and sensitisation workshops for the journalists in order to improve their knowledge on maternal health issues and how to report well in their media organisations.

Keywords: Information dissemination, maternal health, news sources, pregnant women.

1. Introduction

Mass media coverage of maternal health issues is very critical to the overall health wellbeing and survival of the mothers. It is also important to the nation's health care as well because the survival of the nation depends on women giving birth to healthy children and families in communities. Good maternal health care coverage by the mass media for the mothers is, therefore, vital in view of the significant impact they have on the welfare of the entire family and the nation in general. Thus, maternal health focuses on the health wellbeing of the

pregnant women right from the inception of pregnancy, childbirth, the post-natal health care of the mothers and of course antenatal care for the new born baby (Abubakar, DalGLISH, Angell, Sanuade, Abimbola, Adamu & Zanna, 2022; WHO, 2022). The dissemination of credible maternal health information by the mass media is important at these stages of pregnancy in order to enlighten the mothers on the utilisation of maternal health care services so as to prevent complications and numerous problems that may arise in the course of child birth, survival and development.



Understanding pregnant women's reasons for looking for health information is essential to creating interventions and giving them high-quality prenatal care. Numerous research studies (Tsehay 2014; Adeniran & Oso 2020; Javanmardi, Noroozi, Mostafavi, & Ashrafi-Riz, 2022) were conducted to determine the most pertinent and essential ways that lactating and pregnant women can obtain maternal health information in order to support the provision of high-quality prenatal care and other health interventions. According to a study by Tsehay (2014), pregnant women seek health information mostly for the following reasons: lack of understanding, experience with pregnancy issues in the family, risk of pregnancy complications, and desire for a healthy life. Nonetheless, research is still being conducted to determine the best effective way to provide pregnant women with accurate maternal health information, with an emphasis on the preferences and knowledge of information sources held by the women themselves (Kassim, 2021). Therefore, in order to meet the concerns of expectant and nursing mothers, it is necessary to identify through this study appropriate sources of maternal health information seeking media. In order to improve maternal health outcomes and encourage positive health-seeking behaviour, it is essential that women of reproductive age actively seek out maternal health information.

However, lack of any tangible information on the maternal health of pregnant women in the developing countries is a source of public health concern. The pregnant women are severely affected by a lot of problems. These include malnutrition, lack of access to health care facilities and personnel, illiteracy and poverty that bedevilled the mothers. Similarly, the high rate of maternal mortality emanating from pregnancy-related deaths despite the reduction in the number of death indices over the years, calls for the involvement of the mass media for accurate and frequent

information dissemination to arrest the precarious situation. A study showed that the multiple problems faced by pregnant women due to lack of information on maternal care intensified and resulted in the suffering, the exposure of bigger risks of life-threatening situations and death of a lot of pregnant women especially in rural areas (Schantz-Dunn & Nour (2009). In a similar vein, it is observed that the entire health services provided to the pregnant women in most developing countries including Africa did not address the multiple and complex health problems facing women of reproductive age (Ogu & Ephraim-Emmanuel, 2018; WHO, 2018; Ope 2020; Clark, Coll-Seck, Banerjee, Peterson, Dalglish, Ameratunga & Costello, 2020).

2. Literature review

Mass Media and Maternal Health Promotion

The mass media play important roles in information dissemination to the public. It is part of its social responsibility that it owes the society. Through various and numerous programmes, the mass media generate awareness of issues and events and set agenda for national and local discourse. On the aspect of health, the mass media search its beam on various aspects of health issues and disease conditions and call the attention of the government and health officials to the manifest threats of the generality of the nation's wellbeing. In Nigeria, the issues of maternal health coupled with the increase in maternal mortality deserve focus by the mass media to complement the efforts of the health officials and what health professionals are doing to contain disease prevalence and outbreaks. The statistics of maternal mortality rate in the country is worrisome. For instance, the number of maternal deaths remains unacceptably high with maternal mortality ratios of 814 per 100,000 live births in Nigeria, the highest maternal rate in Sub-saharan Africa (Ogu & Ephraim-Emmanuel, 2018; Angell, Sanuade,



Adetifa, Okeke, Adamu, Aliyu, & Abubakar, 2022).

However, despite the fact that access to information on maternal health through credible sources like the mass media serve as important means of reducing maternal morbidity and mortality in Nigeria, numerous broadcast media health programmes within Kaduna state have only few programmes exclusively on maternal health for pregnant women. The state boasts of 26 radio and television stations but only one privately owned station Freedom Radio FM, Kaduna 92.9 focuses exclusively on maternal health called in Hausa “*Ciki da Goyo*”, a 30-minute programme broadcast on Saturday from 09:00 – 09:30am and a repeat on Monday 10:00 – 10:30am. The rest of the health programs in all the broadcast media stations are on general health. In a study conducted by The Punch and the Guardian newspapers on coverage of maternal health in Nigeria, it was found that there was low coverage of maternal health news and thus low awareness creation on maternal health despite the high and frightening maternal mortality rate of 630 per every 100,000 live births in the country (Odesanya, Hassan & Olaluwoye, 2015).

Similarly, due to the scanty nature or dearth of information on maternal health through the mass media of communication, most pregnant mothers prefer to access information on maternal health from other sources than the mass media. Most of the mass media in Nigeria under report maternal health issues and instead emphasize only on general health issues in their coverages and programmes. However, the lack of focus and emphasis on maternal health news is not peculiar to Nigeria alone. It is a phenomenon in Africa. In a study it was found that 93% Tanzanian pregnant women preferred to use health workers and health professionals as their maternal health information sources while the rest of the 7% accessed the information through informal sources such as traditional birth attendants

(TBAs), family members and local community health workers residents in their areas and the least- the mass media (Kassim & Katunzi-Mollel, 2017). The issue of underreportage of the news stories and other valuable information on maternal health by the Nigerian mass media in their news contents and programmes attracted the interest of researchers. In a study conducted on press coverage of maternal health issues in selected Nigeria newspapers, the findings showed a low coverage of maternal health issues thereby indicating the underreporting and absence of prominence, priority and importance given to maternal health news by the Nigeria mass media (Abana, 2017). The mass media as important partners in national development and credible sources of information on maternal health have important roles to play in the campaign in order to create awareness among pregnant women. However, various findings from studies indicated that these important functions of the mass media face challenges due to underreportage and pregnant women are now left to source their information on maternal health from other means.

The success and the achievement of good results in health communication and promotion campaign for creating public awareness and behavior change of health issues and conditions hinged on the adoption of relevant theoretical concepts. According to Corcoran (2016), the success and impact of messages on health communication campaign is measured by the reception and the acting of the target audience that received the health messages. On maternal health campaign, the impact of the mass media messages can be measured from the increase of pregnant mothers that attend antenatal clinics until delivery and act on the information received. Consequently, within the context of the study on maternal health, two vital theories are employed as theoretical underpinning. Firstly, the study is guided by the Development Media



Theory, because it is of the assumption that the media is a powerful tool for attaining national development by disseminating development information to the public. So, disseminating information on health – related issues like maternal health through various radio and television broadcast programmes like news, analysis, interviews, editorials, features, drama, feature films and documentaries are developmental issues. Thus, McQuail summed up the tenets of Development Media Theory and one of the assumptions of this theory relevant to this study is the tenet that posits that: “media must accept and carry out positive development task in line with nationally established policy” (McQuail, 2010).

The second underpinning theory relevant to the study is the Health Belief Model. The model offers a useful and suitable theoretical framework for the explanation and prediction of health behaviours of patients and caregivers. The model focuses on attitudes and beliefs of individuals with six constructs: perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, perceived benefits, perceived barriers, cue to action and self-efficacy (Glanz and Bishop, 2010).

3. Methodology

The researchers adopt the qualitative research method with focus on the phenomenological approach to collect data. The phenomenological approach in this study is apt because it allows the informants to provide the first-person point of view of issues, their lived experiences and the description of events (Smith, 2013). Situating this within the context of this study, phenomenological approach would give the pregnant women ample opportunity to describe how they source their news information on maternal health. Similarly, Purposive sampling was used in picking 15 pregnant women as informants for the study in three communities of Tudun Wada, Sabon Gari and Unguwar Sunusi all In Kaduna metropolis, Nigeria. The idea is

to elicit good response and participation, generate data from their lived experiences and also gain a better understanding of the central phenomenon in the study. Purposive sampling in qualitative research gives highlights on the different features and the characteristics of the population and purposely categorises and selects individuals, groups or sites that can adequately answer the research questions in the study (Creswell, 2012; Keyton, 2019). Furthermore, the researchers used female research assistant to conduct the focus interview due to Islamic tradition of not allowing married women to mingle with men or engage in conversation. The research team took note of this cultural sensitivity and therefore assigned a female research assistant to conduct the interview and get the live experience, opinions and understanding about how they access news information on maternal health. The age group of the informants was within the range of 27-43 years with an average age of 33 years. Their highest educational qualification was degree and the lowest was SSCE. The focus group discussion was conducted in three groups or sessions with five informants in each group. A study asserted that the ideal size of a focus group is 5-10 participants (Keyton, 2019). Again, in another study Guest, Namey and McKenna (2017) discovered that three focus groups were enough to identify all the important themes and subthemes required in the data set. However, Hennink, Kaiser and Weber (2019) identified four focus groups as enough for any data generation in a study.

The duration of the focus group discussion lasted for one hour ten minutes each. The data collected were codified and categorized in themes and sub-themes using NVIVO 10 software. The study therefore explored the following research questions:

RQ1: How do you get news on maternal health?

RQ2: What news sources do you prefer most for information dissemination on maternal health? And why?

4. Results

4.1 Findings

The findings in the study saw the emergence of main themes and sub-themes after the codification and categorization of the data obtained during the conduct of the focus group discussion in three areas of Kaduna metropolis. The researchers used Nvivo 10 software and came out with the models of the themes and sub-themes. These strengthen the study with concrete and solid facts, empirical evidence and insight into the informants' lived

experiences, views and issues that help to gain a better understanding of communities' situation on maternal health news sources and preferences. Both the transcripts and the themes were cross checked by at least an informant in each of the three focus groups for validity, accuracy and factual representation of their ideas. This section therefore interprets the emergence of themes and sub-themes and how they help to answer the research questions. Thus, the thematic analysis came out with important or interesting main themes identified in the study as: news source on maternal health and preference of maternal health news sources. The remaining sub-themes are as follows: mass media (radio/television); health workers; traditional birth attendants (TBAs); relations, friends, mothers.

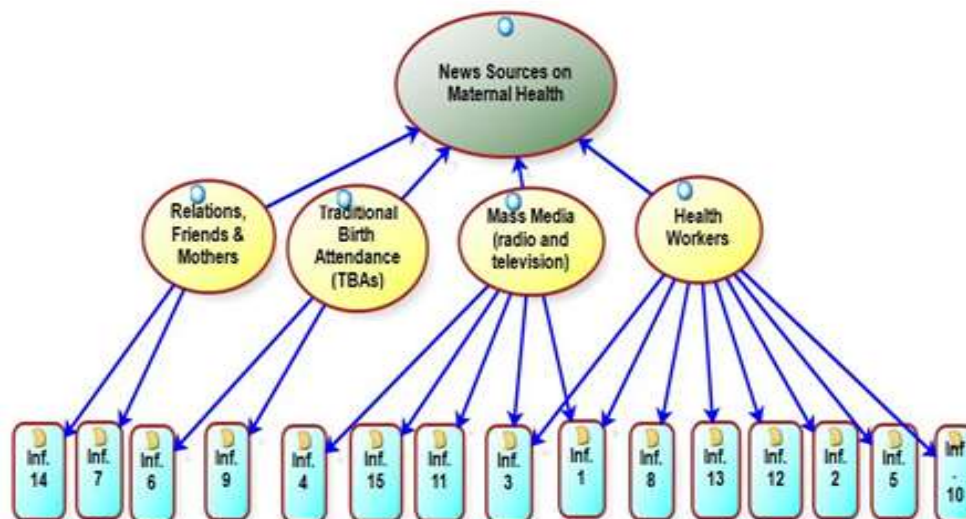


Figure 4.1 News Sources on maternal health

4.1.1 Health Workers

The health workers comprised of trained health personnel in different health sectors that attend to the patients in hospitals and clinics including pregnant women on maternal care. During antenatal clinics the workers mostly nurses, midwives, senior health extension workers, health educators, health environmental officers, nutritionists and the host of other health staff attend to

women and engagement them in health talks and other clinical activities. The source of news on maternal health is, therefore, important in the study and hence the research questions: R1: How do you get news on maternal health? RQ2: What news sources do you prefer most for information dissemination on maternal health? And why? The data collected from the informants in the study reveal that the health workers serve mostly as the news source of maternal health to the pregnant



women. Informant 1 attested to this thus, “I get maternal news first from the health talks that are delivered to us by the nurses and midwives in this clinic. It is always quite an interactive session that allows the pregnant women to ask a lot of questions concerning health issues such as antenatal care, general hygiene and the needed diet required of pregnant mothers”. Also explaining her news source of maternal health, Informant 2 who is a health worker said, “I get my maternal health news from the health institution that I attend and through the numerous health workers that receive pregnant women during clinical practices. We are taught relevant courses that have to do with preventive health, health promotion and maternal health among others. I learnt how to give health talks on health education to pregnant women and during ante natal sessions for the lactating mothers”.

4.1.2 Mass Media (Radio/Television)

Also explaining her news source on maternal health, Informant 3 noted that, “I get the news from radio and television health programmes here in Kaduna and foreign Hausa radio stations like Voice of America, BBC London, Radio France International (RFI) and DW radio Germany. They air maternal health programmes like *Kiwon lafiya*, *Haifi ki yaye*, etc.” Expressing similar view, Informant 4 corroborated this claim thus, “I get the news from the mass media organisation (radio) through their programmes on women’s health and other maternal issues. For example, Freedom Radio FM, Kaduna 92.9 presents exclusively maternal health programme in Hausa language “*Ciki da Goyo*” on Saturdays and Mondays which is very educative not only to pregnant women but other unmarried ladies”. In the same opinion, but categorical, Informant 11 made the same revelation thus, “I always get the maternal health programme from Hausa radio station health programme called “*Ciki da Goyo*” by Freedom Radio FM, Kaduna 92.9. The programme is aired on Saturdays

from 09:00 – 09:30am and the repeat is on Monday 10:00 – 10:30am. The 30-minute Hausa programme is so educative to pregnant women that listen to it”.

Meanwhile, Informant 1 appeared to have two sources of maternal news. She argued that apart from sourcing her maternal news and information from the health workers she also gets it from the mass media: “I also get maternal health news from radio programme mostly from the FM stations here in Kaduna. They always invite health experts to give health talks and persuade the pregnant women to always attend ante natal clinic.”. In the same vein, Informant 15 also sources her maternal news, but in this case, through foreign and local radio stations broadcast in Hausa language. She claims that, the stations have health programmes like “*Haifi ki yaye*” by BBC Hausa; “*Lafiya jari*” by DW Hausa Germany; “*Kiwon lafiya*” by Voice of America Hausa; “*Lafiya Jarice*” by Radio France International and in Kaduna, “*Ciki da Goyo*” by Freedom Radio FM Kaduna.

4.1.3 Traditional Birth Attendants

The traditional birth attendants also serve as news source on maternal health. Informant 6 excitedly confessed, “I first of all acquire the knowledge on maternal health from our Auntie who is a traditional birth attendant. The elderly lady knew all the details required of pregnant women and was always ready to assist them”. Also sharing similar experience of getting maternal health news from the traditional birth attendant, Informant 9 declared, “the traditional birth attendant counselled me on my pregnancy. The aged lady lived in our community and we grew up to know her as TBAs. She attended numerous trainings organized by the Ministry of health for the TBAs. She serves as my source of information”.

4.1.4 Relations, Friends, Mothers

Relations, friends of pregnant women and lactating mothers serve as important news sources of information on maternal health as discovered from the Informants

interviewed in the study. Informant 7 shared her experience on maternal health news source thus, “I come from a relatively large family where relatives, friends and nursing mothers share maternal health information to the newly pregnant women. This act helps a lot to allay the fear in pregnant women in my family. Again, one feels free to ask questions especially from the nieces and childhood female friends that have once given birth. I got a lot of information from them”. Expressing a similar view, Informant 14 explained that, “I get maternal health information first from my relations and female friends before I started going to the clinic for antenatal. This is my first

pregnancy and I have to acquire a lot of information from my relations and nursing mothers to help me know how to handle it”.

4.2 Preference of News Sources on Maternal Health

The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the preference of news on maternal health are similar to the sources of information obtained from the informants in the study. However, the theme and the sub-themes are relevant to the study and can help to answer research question two: “What news sources do you prefer most for information dissemination on maternal health? And why?”

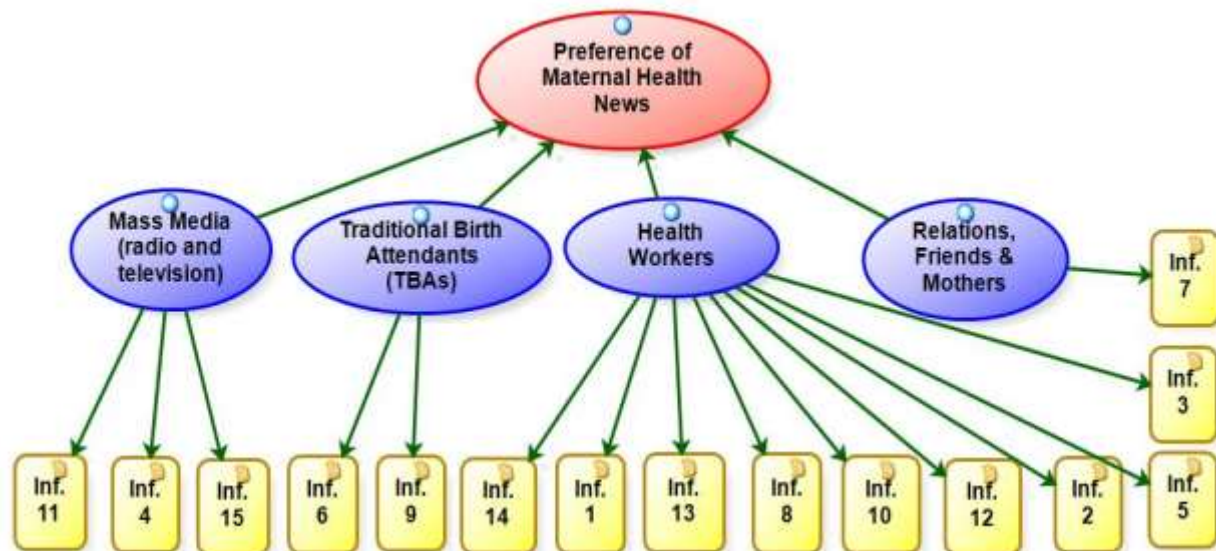


Figure 4.2 Preference of News Sources on maternal health

4.2.1 Health Workers

Preference for health workers (60%) as the news sources on maternal health form the majority of the opinions of the Informants in the study. This was followed by the mass media (radio and television (20%); traditional birth attendants (13%) and lastly, sources of maternal health information from relations, friends and mothers (7%).

5. Discussion

The findings in this study focused on news sources of information on maternal health

among pregnant women from communities of Tudun Wada, Sabon Gari and Unguwar Sanusi all in Kaduna metropolis. All the themes and sub-themes that emerged from thematic analysis from the study show that pregnant women in the area of study source their maternal health information from different sources. In answering the research question one: “How do you get news on maternal health?”, the study established as argued rightly by the data, that pregnant women get their maternal health news mostly from the health workers when they attend antenatal clinics right from the



inception of their pregnancy up to delivery. They gave reasons of accessibility to the health workers, health services and health education that encouraged them to always source the news and information on maternal health from the health workers.

Furthermore, the preference for the health workers also featured prominently in the study among the informants. For example, the pregnant women interviewed mostly preferred the health workers as their sources of maternal health even though a lot argued that they also get information from other sources such as the mass media, traditional birth attendants, relations, friends and lactating mothers. This finding has answered the second research question two: What news sources do you prefer most for information dissemination on maternal health? And why? Similarly, the finding corroborates a study by Kassim and Katunzi-Mollel (2017) where they found that 93% of Tanzanian pregnant women preferred to use health workers and health professionals as their maternal health information sources while the rest of the 7% accessed the information through informal sources such as traditional birth attendants (TBAs), family members and local community health workers residents in their areas and the least- the mass media.

Similarly, the study established the under reporting of the maternal health information within Kaduna metropolis despite the presence of 26 radio and television stations. There was the absence of focus on maternal health news coverage by the mass media and hence the very low choice of the mass media as the source of maternal health by the informants. Even where the respondents mention mass media as their sources of information, it is found to be foreign media outfits such as BBC Hausa, VOA Hausa, DW Hausa and Radio France International (RFI) that broadcast in Hausa language. This outcome also supports a study on press coverage in selected Nigerian newspapers where it was found that they under report maternal health news and information in

their coverage (Odesanya, Hassan & Olaluwoye, 2015; Abana, 2017).

An emerging issue in the study is the good communication skills of the health workers identified by the informants that listen to maternal health programmes in the mass media (radio and television) and the interpersonal communication exhibited when giving health talks in the clinics during antenatal clinic visits. All these enabled the respondents to prefer the health workers and followed by the mass media as their news sources of information on maternal. The informants again claimed to get the right information on maternal health from these two dominant sources. This collaborates a study by Olubunmi, Ofurum and Tob (2016), Hennink, Kaiser and Weber (2019) where interpersonal communication through the health workers is found to generate and enhance healthy decision making by the patients.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study established the need to look at the issue of under reporting maternal health care and news coverage in the mass media. The study therefore recommends that: radio and television stations should address the issue of low coverage of maternal news and information by creating more programmes with focus exclusively on maternal health. The programmes in the broadcast media should be produced in both English and Hausa languages to elicit good responses from the pregnant women. There should be a weekly live-phone-in programme on maternal health. Similarly, the state ministry of health in collaboration with ministry of information and private media organisations to conduct training and sensitisation workshops for the journalists in order to improve their knowledge on maternal health issues and how to report well in their media organisations.



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