Prevention of Maternal Health Complications: Voices of the Rural women through the Lens

Dr. Alberta David Nsemo¹, A/Prof Jennifer Chipps², Dominic. E. Umoh³, Dorathy J. Offiong.⁴

¹(Department of Nursing Science, University of Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria)
²(School of Nursing, University of the Western Cape, Bellville, South Africa)
³(Director, Catholic Schools Board, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria)
⁴(University of Calabar Teaching Hospital, Cross River State, Nigeria)
Protocols

Outline of presentation

- Background
- The problem
- Aim of the study
- Methods
- Results
- Discussions/Concluding statements
- Conclusion
BACKGROUND

- The majority of Nigerian women live in the rural areas where the burden of reproductive ill health is higher.

- The high levels of maternal morbidity and mortality that are prevalent throughout Nigeria are as a result of many factors, including problem recognition and decision-making during emergencies leading to delayed actions, as reported by many studies.
It is essential for women to have access to skilled attendants during pregnancy, delivery and after delivery, and prompt adequate care for obstetric complications if the goal of reducing material morbidity and mortality must be achieved.
Health gains and healthy lives require more than just the provision of services, but such services has to be well utilized. However, the use of skilled providers in developing countries – including Nigeria remain low according to the demography and health survey.


Based on the health promotion approach as outlined by Ottawa Charter, “engaging the rural communities in the defining, designing, planning, and taking collective action in issues that affect their health will contribute to the empowerment of women, families, and communities by increasing their influence and control of material health, as well as increase access and utilization of quality skilled care by women during pregnancy, delivery and post-partum”.

Photovoice is a technique based on participation, educational empowerment, consciousness-raising and self-documentation among ordinary people, compelling them to be agents of change. Local people are given cameras to capture images in the context of their life, thus the critical reflection and dialogue this photography promotes can serve to reveal significant social, cultural and political issues.


THE PROBLEM

- In Cross River State, Nigeria, only 34,890 of women attend labour by skilled attendants while the majority deliver at home, and this situation is worse in the rural communities.
- This contributes to the high ratio of maternal mortality currently being 1,513.4:100,000 live births in the state.

Despite some interventions by the federal and state governments such as:
- Free maternal and child health services
- National Midwives Service Scheme (NMSS)

  Majority of women especially in the rural communities do not use these services.

Findings from studies revealed factors responsible for these to include:

Non utilization of maternal and child health care services

- Lack of information on obst. danger signs
- Lack of community involvement in program designing and implementation
- Negative cultural beliefs and practices
- Women’s limited autonomy in decision making to seek health care
- Lack of BP & CR

These causes delays in seeking appropriate care, thus hampering rural women’s full participation in safe motherhood initiatives.
In identifying this as an area that require further research in Cross River State, Nigeria, Photovoice was identified as an innovative participatory action research method that offers unique contributions to women’s health, especially in rural low income settings.

Photovoice has been proven to be effective in;
- a variety of settings and diverse populations
- enhancing understanding of community needs
- improving M&C health care service utilization.


AIMS OF THE STUDY

The aims of the study were to:

- Engage community members (pregnant women and new mothers) through a participatory approach (photovoice) to highlight problems regarding pregnancy, birth practices and service utilization.
- Identify possible solutions and make recommendations on communities’ role in the prevention of maternal health complications in the rural communities of Cross River State, Nigeria.
Study which was part of my Ph.D research, was done between March and May, 2016.

Design: Qualitative (combined focus group discussions within photovoice participatory approach)

Using a participatory method with a qualitative approach results in:
- The investigation of the phenomena in an in-depth and holistic fashion,
The research could explain the relationships between the social, cultural, political, physical environments and the individual by analyzing the story they tell,

The complexities and the process of participants real life experiences were delved into, and

Participants in this case, were not subjects of research, but rather, were active contributors to research as they participated in all phases of the research process.
Setting: Two (2) communities were purposively selected from Akpabuyo Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria

Community A - Idundu
Community B - Anyanghanse

The choice of these communities was based on their record of low utilization of maternal and child healthcare services from the local government PHC records.
Participants and selection: Twenty (20) women of reproductive age who met the inclusion criteria of
- Being pregnant at any given gestational age
- Have recently given birth (babies within 12 months of age)

Were purposively selected, ten (10) each from the two (2) rural communities under study - Idundu and Anyanghanse.

Entry was gained into the communities through the Clan Heads, who then introduced the two (2) community women leaders to the researcher to assist in identifying the participants in their communities based on the inclusion criteria.
**Sampling**: Non-probability purposive sampling was used. The aim was to choose individuals who will most benefit the study. It was assumed that pregnant women and new mothers will form a rich source of information for the study.
INSTRUMENTATION AND DATA COLLECTION

Photovoice process

Step 1: Photovoice community engagement group. This was done in two (2) phases:

1. **Recruitment of the photovoice group**
   - Venue: the respective community Town Halls for Groups A & B
   - Orientation on photovoice study
   - What photovoice entails
   - Photovoice ethics
   - Study methodology
   - Camera use
   - Types of photos to take based on study focus (Audio recording & field notes taken during the meeting which lasted 1 hour).

2. **Photovoice Training**
   - Three days after the first meeting
   - Venue: same as meeting 1
   - Disposable cameras shared to participants
   - Review on camera use and practice
   - Review on photovoice ethics
   - Emphasis on study focus and photos to take
     (photos were to cover where women seek care during pregnancy, where they deliver, common complications, birth preparedness and complication readiness, family/community support)
   - Participants were given three (3) weeks to take photos.
Step 2: Photovoice focus Groups
At the end of three (3) weeks, two (2) focus group discussions (FGD) were held with the participants

FGD I: Aimed to select and group photos, as well as tell stories/narratives around the photos taken

FGD II: To validate the findings of FGD I

- Participants from communities A & B returned their cameras to the facilitator (Researcher) through their women leaders for development of the photo films and printing.
FGD I:

- Two days after the return of cameras, participants from both communities A & B (n = 15, 8 & 9 respectively) were gathered in the community A town hall to check photo quality, select and group photos and discuss issues around the photos through story telling and narratives.

- Five (5) participants who were absent from family commitment reasons sent in their apologies through their women leader.
A total of ten (10) photos were selected, grouped and categorized under:

A - Domestic Activities and healthcare practices of pregnant women

B - Attitude and access to healthcare services by pregnant women and mothers.

The following photovoice guideline questions were posted to start the FGDs using the acronym SHOeD based on the Wang & Redwood - Jones, 2001 recommendations.

- What do you See in these photos?
- What is really Happening?
- How does it relate to our Lives?
- Why does the situation Exist?
- What can we Do about it?

The first four questions explored the current situations and possible reasons for their situations, while the last question addressed possible future community actions to address the situation.
Photo 1: Pregnant women and new mothers during Photovoice FGD.
Through these, the participants were able to reflect on their lives and communities in terms of the study focus via the dual voice of visual and spoken narratives, serving as agents of authentic change.

The photovoice FGD session was recorded and notes taken alongside.


DATA ANALYSIS

Data generated from the participants’ stories and narratives was analyzed using Tesch’s eight-step method of coding as follows:

- The researcher carefully read through all the transcriptions, making notes of ideas that came to mind.
- Selected one FGD and read it to try to get meaning in the information, writing down thoughts coming to mind.
- Arranged the similar topics in groups by forming columns, labelled major topics; unique topics; and leftovers.
- The researcher abbreviated the topics as codes and wrote the codes next to the appropriate segment of the text.
- Then observed the organisation of data to check if new categories or codes emerged.
- The researcher found the most descriptive wording for the topics and converted them into categories. The aim was to reduce the total list of categories by grouping topics together that relate to each other. Lines drawn between the categories indicated interrelationship of categories.
• A final decision was then made on the abbreviation of each category and the codes were arranged logically.
• The data material belonging to each category was put together in one place and preliminary analysis performed.
• Recoding of the data was done.

**FGD II: Members checking and verification**
A week after the photovoice FGD I, participants were gathered for verbal feedback on the analysis of the findings and the themes that emerged. This lasted for 50 minutes and field note of agreement taken.

_Tesch R (1990) Qualitative research: Analysis types and software tools. Bristol: Falmer_
VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF QUALITATIVE DATA

The model for trustworthiness in qualitative data; credibility, dependability, confirmability, transformability and authenticity, as identified by Lincoln & Guba (1985) was strictly maintained.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Ethical clearance was obtained from:
  - Ministry of Health, Cross River State, Nigeria;
  - The Chairman, Akpabuyo LGA of Cross River State, Nigeria; the community heads, and the women leaders;
  - Informed consent was obtained from the participants for all phases of the study.

- All the participants were assured of anonymity and the right to withdraw at any time during the study without prejudice.
Photovoice ethics:

The following Photovoice ethics and methods were strictly adhered to throughout the Photovoice process:

1. Individuals have a right to privacy in both private and public spaces;
2. Participants need to understand and identify contexts in which consent is needed before photo-taking;
3. The safety of participants must be considered as photographs produced can cause embarrassment;
4. Participants should own the prints and negatives they produce to prevent commercial exploitation and appropriation;
5. Photos taken should be developed by the researcher and should not be shared with anyone but the researcher;
6. Digital copies of the images remained on the researcher’s password-protected computer until data analysis was completed; and since there may be the need to include visual data into research reports. Anticipating this, an exception was built into the consent process requesting the use of certain photos that may reflect member-checked themes.

# RESULTS

## PARTICIPANTS’ DEMOGRAPHICS (N=20)

**Table 1**: Participants demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Idundu (n=10)</th>
<th>Anyanghanse (Community B) (n=10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State: Pregnant New mothers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age: 15-24 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-45 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widow</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House Wives</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traders/Business Workers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PHOTOVOICE PROCESS

A total of 10 photographs were selected and used for the photovoice narratives. They were shared into 2 groups:

A – Domestic Activities and healthcare practices of pregnant women
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Mother with baby working on farm (Photograph 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Pregnant woman sweeping (Photograph 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Pregnant woman carrying wood (Photograph 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Pregnant mother shopping (Photograph 5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image5.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Pregnant mother shopping (Photograph 6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
B - Attitude and access to health care services by pregnant women and mothers

*Pregnant woman with a young man (photograph 7)*

*Traditional birth attendant house (Photographs 8 & 9):*

*A prayer altar is always evident in a TBA’s delivery room (Photograph 9)*
Baby delivered (Photographs 10 & 11):

A popular TBA in the community standing in front of her delivery room with a gloved hand shortly after taking the delivery shown in photograph 10.
Mother feeding baby (Photograph 12)

Waiting at the clinic (Photograph 13)
THEMES EMERGING FROM PHOTOVOICE

- Based on the analysis of the data generated and transcriptions from the narratives of group A photos, four (4) themes with sub-themes and three (3) actions emerged, as shown in table 2 below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Cultural practices impacting on maternal health</td>
<td>• Heavy household chores carried out by mothers is culturally accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Cultural respect for men and subscription to traditional male and female roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Lack of adequate information about maternal and child health issues</td>
<td>• Strenuous work by pregnant women is seen as exercise to reduce prolonged labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Lack of awareness about the health impact of strenuous household chores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Attitudes about appropriate clothing during pregnancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Poverty</td>
<td>• Working to raise money for family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Lack of money for appropriate clothes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Lack of help and support for pregnant women</td>
<td>• Lack of help and support from husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Traditional male and female roles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Actions Identified Through Photovoice**

| A. Recognising and Strengthening the role of men to support women during pregnancy | • The husbands are best placed to provide this support |
|                                                                                   | • Challenges in addressing cultural norms and roles |
| A. Strengthen the role of community to support women during pregnancy            | • The extended family can also provide support         |
|                                                                                   | • Community sensitisation on maternal health issues    |
| A. Improve maternal health education in terms of domestic activities and pregnancy| • Need for education on self-care                      |
Based on the analysis of the data generated from the narratives of Group B photos, seven (7) action recommendations emerged as shown in table 3 below;
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Men are sole decision-makers regarding place of delivery | • Men escort their wives to the birth place for various reasons  
• Men bear the financial burden of healthcare services |
| 1. High preference for TBAs | • High patronage of TBAs by the community women  
• Communal living in TBA homes  
• Spirituality in TBA homes  
• Physical proximity to service point  
• Confidence in TBAs as a first choice  
• Past experience ad belief that first place of birth is safe  
• Poverty and low cost of TBA services |
| 1. Low preference for orthodox healthcare facilities | • Lack of knowledge about availability of free healthcare for women and children in healthcare facilities  
• Past experiences of negative attitude of healthcare providers  
• Fear of health facility injections and operations  
• Absence of healthcare providers on duty at night  
• Perceived costs of health services |
| 1. Poor knowledge of maternal and child care in TBA homes | • TBA’s lack of knowledge on proper delivery procedures and care  
• Lack of education on care of the newborn |
| 1. High recognition of importance of immunization | • Utilisation of immunisation services by women  
• High level of community involvement in awareness-creation on benefits of immunisation |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation Actions Identified for Access and Attitudes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. Free treatment in healthcare facilities</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• ‘Free’ treatment should be free in the real sense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Community involvement in raising awareness of free health services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. Involvement of husbands in ANC</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Men as sole decision-makers should be involved in ANC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Challenges in addressing cultural norms and roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. Spirituality in service delivery</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong faith in prayers and fasting to God during pregnancy for protection should be integrated in health service delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. Community support</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Influence of community heads through levies and sanctions to emphasise importance of utilisation of healthcare facility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Constitution of influential women group to monitor the activities of pregnant women in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use of community structures such as village announcers, churches, women groups, community heads, etc. in emphasising facility delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. Motivation to attend health services</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Receptive attitude of care-providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Occasional gifts to women who utilise orthodox facilities to encourage them and motivate others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Availability of 24-hour services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. TBA training and facility/TBA collaboration</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledge and skills for proper delivery practices of mother and childcare.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• TBA/Facility collaboration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DISCUSSION/CONCLUDING STATEMENTS

The following concluding statements were derived from the study based on the discussions of the themes that emerged;

1. Mothers and pregnant women continue to play traditional roles such as doing household chores due to poverty and cultural roles. This necessitates **identifying ways to include the husband in the planning of maternal care**.

2. Maternal health literacy is low with poor knowledge of maternal health care and self-care, child care, appropriateness of TBA home birth for specific pregnancies, lack of knowledge bout availability of free health care for women and children and there **is a need to identify a strategy to improve maternal health literacy in the community**.

3. Husbands play a key role in decision making and support of the women during pregnancy and there are challenges in changing these cultural norms. The community could play a role in shaping this role to a more supportive role and **identify ways to include the husband in the planning of maternal care**.
4. The importance of spirituality in maternal and child health cannot be overemphasized and strategies should be identified on how to integrate spirituality in orthodox health services and through the integration of the role of the TBA within an overall collaborative model of maternal health care.

5. Strategies for improving access and attendance to orthodox maternal health services could include raising awareness about free treatment, receptive attitude of care-providers and occasional gifts to women who utilise orthodox facilities to encourage them and motivate others as well as the availability of 24-hour services.

6. The community role in support for the pregnant women could be increased and community sensitization would increase the community’s role as a resource for maternal health literacy.
7. There is a low preference for orthodox health services and a strong preference and patronage of TBAs. Strategies should be identified by the community to improve access and attendance of orthodox health services and look for ways to integrate the role of the TBA within an overall model of maternal health care.

8. However, in order to achieve these outcome, the participants suggested engaging the community members through formation of a group, Community Engagement Group (CEG), with the aim of supporting the rural women to ensure that they are knowledgeable about maternal health issues, are well supported by family and community, husbands are involved in the planning of maternal care, that baseless traditional practices and beliefs are corrected, trust and confidence in orthodox healthcare services is built, and integration of the role of the TBAs within an overall collaborative model of maternal care. This will in turn reduce the risk and occurrence of maternal health complications (morbidity and mortality).
The findings of this study and the recommendations from participants however, explain in part results from other investigators who have examined and tested various strategies of engaging community members in the designing, planning, and implementing programs that promote the utilization of skilled maternal healthcare services by pregnant women and mothers in the poor rural settings, thereby preventing maternal health complications.

The present study did not cover the implementation of the participants’ recommendations, specifically the formation of the community engagement group. Hence, this and the evaluation of their effectiveness should be the focus of further research.
IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

Findings have implications for Nursing practice, education and research

- There must be a collaborative approach between the rural communities and nursing/midwifery and other health professionals, for the purpose of constituting a Community Engagement Group (CEG), to achieve the prevention of maternal health complications in rural communities.
- The government or orthodox healthcare providers should use the CEG as their contact point within the communities while carrying out healthcare initiatives.
- Providers of orthodox healthcare should be given re-orientation on attitudinal change in the course of their dealings with rural community members.
- The experiences of the consumers of the healthcare services within the rural communities and that of the members constituting CEGs should be explored using qualitative methodologies.
REFERENCES


LESSONS LEARNED

- It has been demonstrated that active involvement by communities is critical to the success of interventions, and is best ensured if the initiative and responsibility for implementation comes from the community.
- Through Photovoice, each partner was able to bring unique strengths to the process with the core purpose of communicating the intended relationship between planned activities, delivery processes, and targeted outcomes.

YOUR VIEWS?

LET’S SHARE