

# **Women's motivations for using traditional and faith-based birth attendants in urban South-West Nigeria**

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## **Introduction**

Nigeria has a high maternal mortality rate, with 512 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, and a lifetime risk of one in thirty-four women dying from maternal causes in the country (National Population Commission and ICF International, 2019). This high maternal mortality rate is linked with the low utilisation rates of modern healthcare services and facilities among women in Nigeria (National Population Commission and ICF International, 2019). The first and second action points of the third sustainable development goal are to reduce maternal, neonatal and child mortality by the year 2030 (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2017). The Nigeria Health Policy as well as the Nigeria Reproductive Health Policy also have similar actions points, and they recognise that these can only be achieved by increasing the utilisation of maternal healthcare facilities (Federal Ministry of Health, 2010, 2016).

Nigerian women's utilisation of modern maternal healthcare facilities has been consistently low. Findings from the 2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey showed that 57% of women had four or more antenatal care visits; 39% of births were in health facilities and 43% of births were assisted by a skilled healthcare provider, and 42% of women had a postnatal check after delivery (National Population Commission and ICF International, 2019). The continued use of alternative healthcare providers is a contributing factor to this situation. It is a cause of concern, especially in urban areas, as modern healthcare facilities, both government and privately-owned, are readily available in these areas. If the current maternal mortality rates are to be reduced to less than 70 per 100,000 live births by 2030, in line with the Sustainable Development Goal 3, concerted efforts need to be made to increase maternal healthcare utilisation rates. An appreciable part of these efforts would be to understand the motives behind urban women's choice of alternative healthcare providers especially when there are available modern health facilities in their localities. The study objectives were:

1. To examine the characteristics of women who make use of alternative healthcare providers in urban areas in Nigeria.

2. To investigate the factors which lead to preference for alternative healthcare service providers for maternal care among women in urban areas in South-West Nigeria.

## Methodology

This study used the interview qualitative study design to examine the various motives behind the use of alternative healthcare providers for maternal healthcare purposes by urban women in South West Nigeria, and the characteristics of women who use them. In each state, data were collected from twenty clients of alternative healthcare providers such as traditional and faith-based birth attendants using in-depth interviews. Data were analysed using thematic analysis with the aid of NVivo software.

## Findings

The first objective of the study was to examine the characteristics of women who made use of alternative healthcare providers in urban areas of Lagos and Ekiti States. It was observed that the majority of the clients had secondary and higher education, were 25 and older, were Christian, married and had given birth to at least one child previously. This showed that majority of clients were women of above average socio-economic status, were mature, and were familiar with the process of pregnancy and obtaining maternal healthcare.

The second objective of the study examined the factors which led to preference for alternative healthcare providers among clients. Chief among the motivations for use mentioned were the human angle to the provision of maternal care by these providers, compared to what they had experienced in modern health facilities, where there were complaints of harsh attitudes by the health workers, and long waiting times. Also, clients reported affordable costs of services, and a generally favourable perception of the facilities and the services they provide. Most clients had been referred to the facility by a friend, relative, neighbour, or someone equally close to them, and when asked, they were willing to refer the facility to others, with some having said they have done so already.

## Conclusion

The study showed that traditional and faith-based birth attendants are a vital part of the healthcare delivery system in South West Nigeria, and women do, and will continue to patronise them for the foreseeable future, due to religious, cultural and psychosocial reasons. While this may go against government policy drives to increase the utilisation of skilled birth

attendants by Nigerian women, it is important to remain culturally sensitive to the wishes of the populace, and properly integrate alternative maternal health service providers into the healthcare system to ensure the reduction of maternal mortality and morbidity in the country.

The study discovered that contrary to expectations, most clients of traditional and faith-based birth attendants had secondary or higher education, and were married. Also, motivations for use of these alternative providers included religious and psychosocial reasons, such as care, patience, and prayers which put the antenatal clients at ease, compared with using conventional health facilities. In the light of this, the following recommendations are made.

1. Ministries of Health should ensure periodic monitoring of alternative maternal healthcare facilities to ensure that they are carrying out their practices in line with government regulations.
2. The government through the Federal and State Ministries of Health needs to engage more with alternative healthcare providers, and provide licensing criteria for them. As they are a part of the healthcare delivery system, the government also needs to educate the public on what providers are licensed to use to clamp down on quackery in the sector.
3. Ministries of Health at the State and Federal levels need to train health workers to have a better attitude in attending to antenatal clients, as this is a major motivation for the use of alternative healthcare providers.
4. In order to increase the attractiveness of modern health facilities for delivery, traditional and faith-based attendants should be permitted to accompany their clients during delivery as companions of care.

## References

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