

Maternal Clinic Attendance: Does Husbands' Knowledge about Pregnancy and Childbirth have Influence on Intra-Household Decision-Making?

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Abstract

Husbands are very influential in making decisions for maternal healthcare, and the quality and type of decision depend on the level of understanding of maternity. This study explores how husbands' knowledge about key signs of pregnancy and childbirth translates into wives' involvement in decision-making and the type of decisions made towards care-seeking. These qualitative data were generated from individual interviews involving thirty husbands whose spouses were receiving maternity care in the Yendi Municipality of the Northern Region of Ghana. Purposive and quota sampling were used to reach the participants. Irrespective of husbands' knowledge about maternity, cultural beliefs and traditional gender role expectations had a far-reaching effects on wives' involvement in decision-making and the type of decisions made towards care-seeking. Though most husbands with adequate knowledge about maternity were more liberal by involving their wives and respecting their views in the decision-making process, others tended to be more conservative by considering decision-making as men's space. Most decisions were individualistic and male-centred. Healthcare promotion programmes should be directed towards changing the mind-set of men about cultural beliefs and gender roles in relation to maternity care. There should be provision of education on pregnancy and childbirth and the associated benefits and dangers to equip men on how to recognise pregnancy-related complications to enable them to reach informed decisions for care-seeking.

Keywords: Knowledge; Pregnancy and childbirth; Husbands; Decision; Care-seeking; Gender roles; Cultural beliefs.



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1. Background

Studies in maternal healthcare services utilisation have consistently indicated that decision-making is an essential component of maternal clinic attendance (Babalola and Fatusi, 2009; Bougangue, 2017; Ghana Statistical Service, 2009;2015; Ghana Statistical Service Ghana Health Service and Macro International Inc, 2008; Hagman, 2013; International Center for Research on Women, 2008;2010; Tsikata, 2007). Husbands are very influential in decision-making towards healthcare seeking for their spouses. With education as a proxy variable, some researchers have concluded that the quality and type of decision reached between spouses on care-seeking often depend on the level of education of the spouses (Bougangue and Ling, 2017; Ghana Statistical Service, 2009;2015; Ghana Statistical Service Ghana Health Service and Macro International Inc, 2008).

Joint decision-making at the household level is a necessary act for making informed decision for care-seeking in maternity. However, in most African patriarchal societies, women who carry pregnancy and experience the symptoms of its related complications are marginalised in decision-making towards maternity care-seeking (Bougangue, 2017; Hagman, 2013). This is because decision-making is regarded as an act of protection which is men's space (Bougangue and Ling, 2017; Bougangue, 2017). In traditional Ghanaian society, though some men may engage their spouses in intra-household decision-making, the final decision on care-seeking is usually reached based on the man's own assessment of severity of the woman's condition and need for professional care (Ampim, 2013; Bougangue, 2017).

Research indicates that most men are not much closer to maternity issues which could be interpreted to mean that they may lack the knowledge to make informed decisions for their spouses. This presupposes that some men are most likely to make wrong decisions which may have a far-reaching implications for maternal foetal and neonatal health. Involvement of women in decision-making for their healthcare yields positive outcome (International Center for Research on Women, 2008;2010). Besides, female autonomy in decision-making facilitates positive behaviour towards maternity care-seeking which is a necessary pre-condition for improved maternal and neonatal health (Babalola and Fatusi, 2009; Hagman, 2013). In the light of this, this paper explores how husbands' knowledge about maternity and its related complications influences decision-making towards maternity care-seeking and the type of decisions made at intra-household level vis-a-vis clinic attendance. The paper provides insight into how healthcare decision-making affects women's health during the pregnancy-postpartum period in connection with the choice of healthcare services, timing and number of clinical visits. This has become necessary because gender inequality and

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