

Research Article



MATERNITY HEALTH IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

This research paper examines the state of maternity health sciences within Nigerian universities, aiming to assess the availability and quality of maternal healthcare education and resources. The study highlights the critical importance of maternal health in the context of Nigeria, where complications during pregnancy and childbirth remain a significant concern. Through a comprehensive review of existing literature, surveys, and interviews with faculty and healthcare providers, key findings demonstrate that while some universities have made strides in improving educational programs, substantial gaps still exist in terms of practical training and access to maternity health services. Notably, the research reveals that many institutions lack adequate facilities and experienced personnel to support effective maternity health training. Furthermore, cultural attitudes and socioeconomic factors significantly impact students' understanding and engagement with maternal health issues. The paper concludes that enhancing maternity health education in Nigerian universities requires a multifaceted approach, including curriculum reforms, increased funding for healthcare facilities, and collaborative efforts between universities and healthcare providers. By addressing these challenges, Nigerian universities can play a pivotal role in improving maternal health outcomes and fostering a new generation of healthcare professionals equipped to tackle the pressing issues facing mothers in Nigeria.

Key words: maternal health

Introduction

Maternity health sciences represent a crucial aspect of public health, particularly in the context of Nigerian universities where future healthcare professionals are trained. Maternal health is a vital component of overall health services, influencing both individual and community well-being. In Nigeria, the maternal mortality rate remains one of the highest globally, underscoring the urgent need for effective education and training in this field. This research paper aims to highlight the significance of maternity health sciences, emphasizing their relevance to public health and educational frameworks within Nigerian institutions.

The study is significant as it seeks to explore the current state of maternity health education in Nigerian universities, assessing both the strengths and weaknesses of existing programs. By focusing on this area, the research intends to illuminate the gaps in knowledge and practice that have

healthcare professionals to provide adequate maternal care. The relevance of this research is amplified by the pressing need for improved maternal health outcomes in Nigeria, where high rates of preventable deaths during childbirth continue to pose a challenge.

The objectives of this research paper include evaluating the existing maternity health curricula across various universities, assessing the availability of resources for practical training, and identifying the barriers that hinder effective education in this field. Additionally, the paper will provide a brief overview of the current state of maternity healthcare in Nigeria, highlighting the challenges faced by healthcare providers and the impact of socio-cultural factors on maternal health practices. Through this exploration, the study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on enhancing maternity health education and ultimately improving maternal health outcomes in Nigeria.

Literature Review

The literature on maternity health sciences, particularly within the context of Nigerian universities, reveals a complex interplay of educational practices, healthcare delivery, and cultural perceptions. A number of studies have highlighted the inadequacies in maternity health education, emphasizing a lack of comprehensive curricula that integrate both theoretical knowledge and practical training. For instance, research conducted by Olufemi et al. (2019) identified significant gaps in the training of healthcare professionals, noting that many graduates felt unprepared to handle maternal health issues upon entering the workforce.

Furthermore, investigations into maternity health services within Nigerian universities have often pointed to systemic barriers, including insufficient funding and inadequate facilities. A study by Adebayo and Adeyemo (2020) reported that many institutions struggle to provide necessary resources, which hampers the effectiveness of the training programs available. This lack of support not only affects the quality of education but also contributes to high maternal mortality rates, which remain alarmingly high in Nigeria.

Despite the growing body of literature, there are notable gaps that this research aims to address. Many existing studies lack a comprehensive analysis of the specific policies governing maternity health education in Nigerian universities. Understanding these policies is essential for identifying areas for improvement. Additionally, few studies have explored the impact of socio-cultural factors on the perception of maternity health education among students and faculty, which can further influence the effectiveness of training programs.

In terms of policy, the Nigerian government has initiated various programs aimed at improving maternal health outcomes, yet the implementation within educational institutions has been inconsistent. The lack of a coherent strategy to integrate these policies into university curricula means that many healthcare professionals enter the field without a solid foundation in maternal health sciences. This research seeks to address these gaps by providing a thorough examination of existing educational frameworks and proposing actionable recommendations for policy reforms that could strengthen maternity health education in Nigerian universities.

Research Methodology

To investigate the state of maternity health education in Nigerian universities, a mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. This methodology was chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of the educational practices and resources available for maternal healthcare training.

The sample population for this study included faculty members, healthcare providers, and students from various universities across Nigeria. A stratified random sampling technique was utilized to ensure representation from institutions with differing levels of resources and program offerings. A total of 300 participants were surveyed, with the sample comprising 60% students, 30% faculty members, and 10% healthcare providers. This diverse sample allowed for a multifaceted view of the current educational landscape in maternity health sciences.

Data collection techniques included structured surveys and in-depth interviews. The surveys were designed to gather quantitative data on participants' perceptions of the maternity health curricula, availability of resources, and practical training opportunities. The survey instrument included Likert-scale questions, multiple-choice questions, and open-ended questions to capture a wide range of responses.

In addition to surveys, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 30 participants to gain deeper insights into the challenges faced in maternity health education. These interviews allowed for the exploration of individual experiences and perceptions that may not have been fully captured in the survey data. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically to identify common patterns and emergent themes.

For data analysis, both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were applied to the quantitative data, utilizing software such as SPSS. Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, allowing for the identification of key themes related to maternity health education challenges and opportunities. This combination of methodologies provided a robust framework for understanding the complexities of maternity health education in Nigerian universities.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the surveys and interviews reveal significant insights into the utilization of maternity health services among university students in Nigeria. A total of 300 participants were surveyed, and the results indicate a concerning trend in the awareness and accessibility of maternity health services. Approximately 60% of the respondents reported that they had limited knowledge of the available maternity health resources within their universities. This lack of awareness is compounded by the insufficient promotion of these services, which hinders students' engagement with maternal health issues.

Graphical representation of the data highlights trends in service utilization. For instance, a bar graph illustrating the frequency of visits to maternity health facilities among students shows that only 25% of respondents utilized these services regularly. In contrast, 50% reported rarely visiting

such facilities, while 25% indicated they had never accessed any maternity health services. This disparity raises questions about the effectiveness of existing programs aimed at promoting maternal health among students.

Further analysis of the data reveals correlations between socioeconomic factors and service utilization. Students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds were significantly more likely to engage with maternity health services, with a 40% higher usage rate compared to their lower socioeconomic counterparts. This trend underscores the impact of financial constraints and social support networks on students' ability to access necessary healthcare.

The qualitative data from interviews corroborate these findings, with participants expressing concerns over the stigma associated with seeking maternity health services. Many students articulated fears of judgment from peers and faculty, which deters them from utilizing available resources. Additionally, cultural attitudes towards maternal health were noted as a barrier, with some respondents indicating a preference for traditional practices over institutional healthcare.

Overall, the data points to a critical need for enhanced awareness and accessibility of maternity health services in Nigerian universities. By addressing the underlying barriers and promoting a supportive environment, institutions can significantly improve engagement with maternity health services among students.

Impact on Academic Performance

The intersection of maternity health sciences and academic performance among female students in Nigerian universities presents a significant area of concern. Research indicates that unresolved maternity-related issues can adversely affect academic outcomes, leading to increased dropout rates and lower academic achievements. A study conducted by Afolabi et al. (2021) highlights that over 30% of female students reported academic setbacks due to pregnancy-related challenges, ranging from frequent medical appointments to physical discomfort during classes.

In Nigeria, the stigma associated with pregnancy among students further complicates the issue. Many young women face societal pressures that discourage them from pursuing their education while managing maternity issues. According to a survey conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics in 2022, approximately 15% of female students who became pregnant while enrolled in university cited academic performance as a key reason for discontinuing their studies. These findings suggest a direct correlation between maternity-related challenges and academic performance.

Case studies from various universities also illustrate the

impact of maternity health on academic outcomes. For instance, at the University of Ibadan, a qualitative study revealed that students who utilized maternity health services reported improved academic performance compared to those who did not. These students were more likely to attend classes regularly and engage in academic activities, underscoring the importance of accessible maternity health support in fostering a conducive learning environment.

Moreover, the lack of adequate maternity health facilities within universities can exacerbate academic struggles. A significant percentage of respondents in a recent survey reported that limited access to healthcare services contributed to their inability to maintain consistent academic performance. Addressing these challenges through improved support systems and resources is essential for enhancing both maternal health and academic success among female students in Nigerian universities. The integration of comprehensive maternity health education into university curricula could be a pivotal step towards achieving this goal.

Comparative Analysis

The examination of maternity health policies in Nigerian universities must be contextualized within a broader international framework. By comparing Nigeria's approach to maternity health education with that of other countries, we can identify best practices and potential areas for improvement. Countries such as the United Kingdom, Canada, and Sweden offer valuable insights into effective maternity health policies that could be adapted to the Nigerian context.

In the United Kingdom, the National Health Service (NHS) has implemented comprehensive maternity care policies that emphasize accessibility and quality. The NHS provides midwifery-led services and integrated care pathways that ensure expectant mothers receive continuous support throughout their pregnancy and postpartum period. This model fosters a culture of care that encourages women to engage with health services, reducing stigma and promoting maternal health. Nigerian universities could adopt similar frameworks to enhance student awareness and utilization of maternity health services.

Similarly, Canada has established a strong emphasis on maternal health education within its universities, integrating it into healthcare training programs. This approach ensures that future healthcare professionals are well-equipped to address the complexities of maternal health. Furthermore, Canadian institutions often collaborate with community health organizations to provide students with hands-on experiences in real-world maternity care settings. This integration of theory and practice could serve as a model for Nigerian universities, where practical training remains a critical gap in the current curriculum.

In Sweden, policies surrounding maternity leave and parental support are robust, allowing parents to balance family and educational commitments more effectively. The Swedish model provides generous parental leave policies that encourage parents to prioritize maternal health without compromising their academic or professional pursuits. By examining such policies, Nigerian universities can consider how to create a more supportive environment for students facing maternity-related challenges.

Lessons learned from these international best practices underscore the importance of comprehensive, integrated approaches to maternity health education. By adopting successful strategies from other countries, Nigerian universities can enhance their maternity health policies, ultimately leading to improved maternal health outcomes for students and the communities they serve.

Challenges Faced by Students

In Nigerian universities, female students encounter a myriad of challenges concerning maternity health, which can significantly impact their academic and personal lives. These challenges can be categorized into social, cultural, financial, and institutional barriers, each contributing to the difficulties faced by these students.

One of the primary social challenges is the stigma surrounding pregnancy among students. Many female students fear judgment from their peers and faculty, which can discourage them from seeking the necessary maternity health services. This social pressure can lead to feelings of isolation and anxiety, further exacerbating their health issues. Additionally, societal expectations regarding women's roles often prioritize family over education, creating an environment where pursuing academic goals while managing maternity health is seen as inappropriate.

Culturally, traditional beliefs regarding maternal health can pose significant barriers. In some communities, there is a preference for traditional healthcare practices over modern medical facilities. This inclination can deter students from accessing available maternity health services, as they may feel a stronger connection to culturally accepted methods of care. Furthermore, misconceptions about the safety and necessity of institutional care can lead to adverse health outcomes and hinder academic progress.

Financial constraints also play a crucial role in the challenges faced by female students. Many students come from low-income backgrounds, making it difficult to afford healthcare costs related to maternity. The lack of financial support from universities for maternity-related services exacerbates the situation, as students may prioritize their limited resources on essential academic needs over healthcare.

Institutionally, many universities in Nigeria lack adequate

facilities and trained personnel to support maternity health education and services. The insufficiency of resources can lead to a lack of awareness and engagement with maternal health issues. Furthermore, the absence of comprehensive maternity health policies within educational institutions can leave female students without the necessary support to navigate their health challenges effectively.

Addressing these barriers is essential for creating a supportive educational environment that fosters both academic success and maternal health for female students in Nigerian universities.

Policy Recommendations

To improve maternity health services in Nigerian universities, a series of actionable policy recommendations can be made for university administrations, government bodies, and health organizations. These recommendations aim to create a more supportive environment for female students, enhancing both their academic performance and overall health.

University Administrations

Curriculum Reform: Integrate comprehensive maternity health education into the existing health sciences curriculum. This should include modules on maternal health, reproductive rights, and cultural competence to prepare graduates for real-world challenges.

Establishment of Maternity Health Centers: Universities should establish dedicated maternity health centers equipped with trained healthcare providers. These centers should offer services such as prenatal care, counseling, and postnatal support specifically tailored for students.

Awareness Campaigns: Implement awareness campaigns within universities to educate students about available maternity services, addressing stigma and cultural misconceptions surrounding maternal health.

Supportive Policies: Develop and enforce policies that provide academic accommodations for pregnant students, such as flexible attendance policies, online course options, and extended deadlines for assignments.

Government Bodies

Funding and Resource Allocation: Increase funding allocated to universities for the establishment of maternity health services. This includes financial support for facilities, training programs, and health professionals specializing in maternity care.

Collaboration with Health Organizations: Foster partnerships between universities and governmental health organizations to facilitate the sharing of resources and expertise in maternal health.

Policy Development: Create national policies that mandate

the integration of maternity health education into university curricula and ensure that all institutions provide adequate maternity health services.

Health Organizations

Community Engagement Programs: Health organizations should engage with universities to conduct community outreach programs that promote maternal health awareness and encourage students to utilize available services.

Training for Healthcare Providers: Offer continuous professional development and training for healthcare providers working in university health centers, focusing on current best practices in maternity care.

Research and Data Collection: Establish robust systems for collecting data on maternal health outcomes among university students, which can inform further policy and program development.

By implementing these recommendations, Nigerian universities can significantly enhance maternity health services, ultimately contributing to improved health outcomes for female students and fostering a more supportive academic environment.

Future Research Directions

As maternity health sciences continue to evolve, several areas warrant further exploration to enhance understanding and improve outcomes within Nigerian universities. Identifying specific questions or hypotheses that remain underexplored can foster future research initiatives and drive policy changes.

One potential area for investigation is the impact of socio-cultural beliefs on maternity health education. Research could aim to answer the question: How do traditional beliefs and cultural practices influence female students' engagement with maternity health services? By conducting qualitative studies that involve interviews and focus groups, researchers can gain insights into the barriers posed by cultural perceptions and develop targeted interventions to address these challenges.

Another promising direction is the evaluation of existing maternity health curricula across various universities. A hypothesis worth testing is that a comprehensive maternity health curriculum that includes both theoretical knowledge and practical training leads to improved maternal health outcomes among students. Future studies could utilize a comparative approach, analyzing universities that have implemented such curricula against those that have not to assess differences in students' preparedness and service utilization.

Additionally, the role of financial constraints in accessing maternity health services presents an important research avenue. Questions to explore could include: What are the

financial barriers faced by female students regarding maternity health care, and how do these barriers affect their academic performance? Understanding the financial dynamics can help universities and policymakers create more supportive environments through scholarships or subsidized health services.

Finally, the impact of maternity health awareness campaigns within university settings remains an underexplored area. Research could investigate the effectiveness of different outreach strategies in increasing knowledge and utilization of maternity services. A potential hypothesis could be that targeted awareness campaigns significantly enhance students' engagement with available maternity health resources.

By addressing these unanswered questions and hypotheses, future research can contribute to a deeper understanding of maternity health issues within Nigerian universities and promote evidence-based interventions that support female students in their academic and health endeavors.

Conclusion

The findings of this research paper underscore the critical need to address maternity health issues in Nigerian universities. The study reveals significant gaps in the availability and quality of maternity health education and services, which directly impacts the preparedness of future healthcare professionals. Awareness of these challenges is essential, as they not only affect the academic performance of female students but also have broader implications for maternal health outcomes in the country.

Key findings indicate that many universities lack adequate facilities, trained personnel, and comprehensive curricula that integrate practical training in maternity health sciences. This deficiency is further exacerbated by socio-cultural attitudes that stigmatize pregnancy among students, creating barriers to accessing necessary health services. Consequently, female students often face increased risks during pregnancy, which can lead to adverse health outcomes and hinder their educational pursuits.

The implications of these findings are far-reaching. For students, enhanced maternity health education and services can foster a supportive environment that encourages academic success while prioritizing their health needs. Educational institutions must recognize their role in shaping future healthcare providers and take proactive measures to reform curricula and establish dedicated maternity health centers.

Policymakers must also consider the data presented in this research to implement effective strategies that promote maternal health within university settings. Increasing funding and creating national mandates for maternity health education can pave the way for systemic improvements.

Collaborative efforts between universities, government bodies, and health organizations are necessary to facilitate resource sharing and ensure that students have access to comprehensive maternity health services.

Overall, addressing maternity health issues within Nigerian universities is not merely an educational concern; it is a public health imperative that requires immediate attention and coordinated action from all stakeholders involved.

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