

Barriers to accessing maternal health services in Uganda: an investigation into the experiences of women living in the slums of Kampala

Kenna, Aoife

MDP Student Dublin, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland, aoifekenna@gmail.com

Understanding the barriers women face in accessing maternal health services (MHS) in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is imperative to achieving Target 3.1 of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The target implores the reduction of maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births by 2030 (UN, 2015). Today, the maternal mortality ratio in SSA remains high at 546 per 100,000 live births (UNICEF, 2017), the highest of all regions globally. Extensive research has been carried out focused on barriers to MHS access in rural areas across SSA (Rutaremwa et al., 2015). However, the marginal value of this research focus is changing. As of 2012, 32.8% of the population in SSA lives in urban areas (ABDG, 2012). This figure is expected to rise to 50% by 2030, and 60% by 2050. Furthermore, rapid urbanisation has resulted in the proliferation of slums rather than formal settlement construction in SSA (2012). Although some 33% of the population live in urban areas, the proportion of slum dwellers is 65% (2012). Furthermore, this proliferation is set to rise with increasing urbanisation.

There is a dearth in research available on the maternal health status of women in slums across SSA, and no research carried out in the slums of the city of Kampala. This specific research aims to address this dearth and provide value by examining the barriers facing women in accessing MHS in the slums of Kampala, Uganda. This investigation utilises both quantitative and qualitative research methods, in the form of questionnaires and focus groups, thus providing both an in-depth and broad understanding of these barriers. The research participants include women of reproductive age living in the slums, international NGOs operating in the slums and local health workers. These methods will provide a deeper understanding of the different perception of such barriers between those working in the health sphere and the lived experiences of the women in the slums.

This perspective research will identify trends of the barriers women face in accessing MHS in the slums of Kampala and it is hoped that it will pave the way for future research in slums across SSA. Furthermore, this research is essential in aiding local policymakers in ensuring enhanced availability of MHS for growing urban populations. Additionally at an international level this research will provide evidence of the importance of a holistic approach to the provision of MHS focusing in both rural and urban areas.

Access to MHS is vital for women's well-being, the reduction of maternal and infant mortality. The presence of explicit targets for the reduction of maternal mortality in both the Millennium Development Goals and SDGs highlights its significance. Thus, in identifying the barriers facing women in accessing MHS in the slums of Kampala, this research serves to identify the social determinants of maternal health for the marginalised members of the Ugandan population allowing for improvements in MHS access in the future. Growing urbanisation will continue to put pressure on MHS in urban areas. Without evidence-based research identifying these issues for local, national and international organisations, Target 3.1 and thus sustainable development

cannot and will not be achieved. In fact the progress made since the turn of the Millennium may even be reversed.