THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTHCARE OUTCOMES: A CASE OF MACHAKOS COUNTY, KENYA

ABSTRACT

This study sought to find out the role of communication in maternal and child healthcare outcomes in Machakos County, Kenya. The objectives of the study were to (i) examine the basic levels of knowledge on maternal and child healthcare among women of reproductive age, (ii) identify the existing modes of communication between maternal and child healthcare providers and the women of reproductive age and finally, (iii) determine the effectiveness of various types of communication used in maternal and child health communication in Machakos County. The study used Social Cognitive Theory, Health Belief Model and the Uses and Gratification theories to explain perceptions, knowledge, attitudes, practices and behaviour change in maternal and child health. The research utilized mixed-methods design, which utilizes the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative data from respondents. Interviewer-guided questionnaires were used for the quantitative data while interviews were used for qualitative data. The study target population was of women of reproductive age between 15-44 years, with a sample size of three hundred respondents. A total of five interviewees were selected through purposive sampling technique for the in-depth interviews. From the findings, the researcher can categorically state that women of reproductive age in Machakos County were aware about maternal and child health care. Most women of reproductive age were in the age cohort of 20-24 and had attained at least secondary school level education and were therefore able to comprehend maternal and child healthcare matters communicated to them. The study established that there were existing modes of communication between maternal and child healthcare providers and the women of reproductive age, the most frequent being the use of healthcare workers (doctors and nurses) on one-on-one discussions. The respondents preferred this as healthcare workers took adequate time to interact with them, at any time or when necessary. From the study, it can be deduced that healthcare workers using one-on-one communication was the most effective mode of communication in maternal and child healthcare. This is attributed to the interpersonal nature of communication, use of a language that the woman will be conversant with and an interactive engagement between the healthcare worker and the woman. The most communicated aspect of maternal and child healthcare according to this study findings were matters relating to antenatal care, family planning, and exclusive breastfeeding. The research recommends that healthcare workers ought to have regular training and capacity building in order to equip them with relevant up to date information that they would relay to the women during clinic visits and other forums of interaction. The study also recommends that healthcare workers ought to do more preemptive programs on health communication and education, not just when there is need like during disease outbreaks. The study therefore recommends that more emphasis should be laid on strengthening the healthcare workers’ communication skills and on updating their knowledge on maternal and child healthcare since this was identified as the most effective mode of communication.
on maternal and child healthcare. Both levels of government at county and national level should have proper policies on health communication, and departments within the ministry whose focus is strengthening aspects of health communication, and not only on maternal and child health

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