

Behavioral Prevention for Maternal Health in Haiti

Behavioral prevention is a crucial step in helping Haitian mothers and families avoid maternal health problems. There are several precautions that can be taken on a personal level as well in larger communities to create prevention strategies that will help reduce diseases. In addressing the issue with a wide scope, there are opportunities for the mass distribution of information that would be able to reach communities that have high maternal mortality throughout Haiti. One of the most significant challenges within Haiti in regard to health services is accessibility. Those who are living in rural areas of Haiti do not have access to proper health facilities or health care workers. A potential solution for rural inhabitants would be the use of radio broadcasting. In this, radio stations would broadcast David Werner's book, "Where There is No Doctor", which is a medical guide directly aimed at people living in developing countries. By broadcasting this information over the radio, an alternative to school-based programs will be provided, which is critical because many children are unable to attend school in developing countries. The book has useful information on how those living in developing countries can prevent, diagnose and treat various diseases. This information can be utilized and administered to assist those who are unable to access health workers or a local hospital. Since education is able to play a key role in prevention, it is clear that it would be able to help solve Haiti's maternal health problems.

There are many preventive measures that women must be taught in order to help them avoid disease. Among these procedures, the most critical information has to do with proper sanitation and hygiene in order to curtail the spread of infections. With this, women must learn how to properly wash food, boil water and utilize correct cleaning techniques to kill any parasites and diseases without damaging the nutrients in the food. Furthermore, properly disposing waste is a simple measure that can be promoted to drastically reduce the spread of diseases. An emphasis on safe sex, by means of sexual education, is also crucial in helping to prevent STDs and HIV/AIDS. As such, all Haitian women should be educated specifically on maternal issues, and pregnant women should learn how to care for themselves in order to effectively eradicate Haiti's poor maternal health. If women are educated in these various ways, they will be better equipped for maternity and will be able to live a more healthy life.

The primary causes of maternal mortality in Haiti are dependent on access to healthcare and health services. Due to the extreme poverty of Haiti, it is clear that alternative methods of health care delivery must be utilized in order to reach women in rural areas. There are, however, various socio-economic conditions that make it difficult to implement these projects for maternal health. Barnes-Josiah, Myntti and Ausustin discuss in their article "The 'Three Delays' as a Framework for Examining Maternal Mortality in Haiti" that Haiti's high maternal mortality is partially due to the delay in seeking appropriate medical help for an obstetric emergency. In this, Haitian women are not able to receive medical assistance when they first need it, making it more likely that complications will arise. The authors suggest that the scope of health services must increase, along with its quality, in order to significantly help Haitian women in issues of

maternity. This notion is furthered in Chatterjee's piece, "Haiti's Forgotten Emergency", in which he states that maternal mortality in Haiti is so high because there are no health facilities near the majority of rural areas, and the burden for a woman to travel to one is often far too great. This article also records that the maternal mortality rate is 630 for every 100,000 births. Paul Farmer highlights the socio-political and socio-economic roots of Haiti's maternal health issues in his article "Political Violence and Public Health in Haiti". Farmer discusses Haiti's coup d'état in 1991 that proved to undermine many of the country's successful health services by sending it further into debt and as a result, limited its ability to provide health services. This political and economic turmoil had adverse affects on Haiti's maternal health, as physicians and nurses became restricted in providing for their patients. Many mothers throughout Haiti have been put at risk out of their dependence on traditional healers rather than trained professionals. In their article, "Association Between Maternal Use of Traditional Healer Services and Child Vaccination Coverage in Pont-Sende, Haiti", Muula, Polycarpe, Job, Siziya and Rudatsikira discuss that women who rely on these healers are less likely to have their children vaccinated, and are consequently put at risk for many preventable diseases. The Pan American Health Organization addresses these health challenges and argues in "The Challenge of Haiti: Health, a Right for All" that Haiti's institutional and structural concerns must first be tackled in order to properly solve its health concerns. Moreover, international support may be necessary in order for Haiti to recover from its social-political turmoil and combat the issues associated with maternal health. While it is clear that Haiti must address its various issues to lower maternal mortality, Haitian women must also find ways to receive proper health care instead of relying on untrained healers. If professional care is completely unavailable, women must be able to care for themselves, which could only result from an emphasis on education in Haiti to promote sanitation, hygiene and better maternal health.

Although Haiti is in a transition period where responsibility is being handed back to the government, NGOs and public health systems continue to have a vital role in Haiti's healthcare. According to Frieden, Dowell and Tappero in "Public Health in Haiti – Challenges and Progress", the Ministry of Public Health and Population has been active in providing Haiti with technology to monitor possible disease outbreaks. This organization has experienced further triumphs in Haiti by helping to develop techniques for effectively utilizing its resources. While this organization has been successful in Haiti, Jobe argues in "Disaster Relief in Post-Earthquake Haiti: Unintended Consequences of Humanitarian Volunteerism" that there is a lack of cooperation between NGOs and the government. Jobe states that these NGOs fail to consider the economic repercussions of their actions and that in order to be truly effective, they must work more closely with Haiti's government to build a sustainable public health sector. Despite the surge of aid since the earthquake in 2010, Moszynski clarifies in his work that many Haitian women still face unsafe birthing conditions. In this, he argues that the lack of access to healthcare along with scarce information on family planning makes it difficult for prospective mothers in Haiti to live. To combat these maternal health challenges, the Canadian International Development Agency has received funding from CIDA to reduce maternal mortality through family planning, education and the provision of medicine.

Similarly, the Canadian Network for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health has provided useful information for organizations dealing with issues associated with maternal health in regions such as Haiti. To try and alleviate Haiti of its maternal health burdens, the Partners in Health organization has built a women's health clinic to focus specifically on maternal health. Moreover, the organization has provided training for health workers in an attempt to prevent a further rise in maternal mortality. While these organizations are geared directly toward Haiti's maternal health issues, it is clear that more must be done to teach women how to care for themselves and seek help when it is needed. If organizations can help by spreading behavioral prevention techniques, the women of Haiti will be more able to lower maternal mortality and engage in healthy family planning decisions.