

Sensitizing community to increase uptake of obstetric fistula repair services in north-western Tanzania

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INTRODUCTION: It is estimated that about 3,500 new cases of obstetric fistula (OF) occur yearly in Tanzania. Despite of the availability of OF repair and care services in some hospitals in the country, majority of affected women rarely seek services due to stigma and limited information. Amref Health Africa through its two-year *Jitambue* project provided support of OF repair services in northwestern Tanzania. Our study aims to assess the impact of project's community sensitization activities and media in increasing uptake of the OF repair services.

METHODS: A cross-sectional descriptive study using baseline (2009-2010) and final project surveys data (2011-2012) from three different level hospitals; tertiary (Bugando Medical Center (BMC)), regional (Sekou Toure), district (Geita) was conducted. The BMC provides referral healthcare services to eight regions in north-western Tanzania with total population of 13 million people. Data were analyzed using SPSS 16.

RESULTS: Between January 2011 and June 2012, there had been an increase of more than 300% of fistula cases presented themselves for repair at BMC as compared of the baseline survey (85 versus 355 cases). For Sekou Toure Hospital, 6 fistula cases were attended as compared to none during baseline. Study observed 37% decrease of fistula cases who sought services at Geita district hospital from baseline (16 versus 10 cases). Generally, the average age for those received OF repair services was higher 36.3 years versus 25.6 years during baseline survey.

CONCLUSION: Findings from this study show that number of OF affected women who sought services has been increasing in regional and tertiary hospitals. This implies that community is becoming aware that OF can be treated and prevented. Therefore, intensification of OF community sensitization activities and scale up of repair and care services to the district hospitals should be considered to address the low uptake.

Key words: obstetric, fistula, repair, uptake, Tanzania