

THE ROLE OF WOMEN'S DECISION-MAKING POWER IN HOUSEHOLD MATERNAL HEALTH ASSISTANCE: EXPLORING INTERLINKED FACTORS AND PATHWAYS TO DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the significant role that women's decision-making power within households plays in the utilization of maternal health services, focusing on the complex interrelations between socioeconomic, educational, and cultural factors. With the use of maternal health assistance being a critical factor for reducing maternal mortality and improving health outcomes for both mothers and infants, understanding the determinants of women's agency in this context offers insights into sustainable development pathways. This study draws on existing literature and statistical analyses from diverse socio-cultural settings to underscore how enhanced decision-making power for women can catalyze broader development goals.

Keywords: Women's decision-making power,, Maternal health assistance, Household autonomy, Socioeconomic factors, Education, Cultural norms, Health outcome, Development pathways, Gender equality, Sustainable development.

I. INTRODUCTION

Maternal health remains a cornerstone of public health agendas, particularly in developing regions where maternal mortality rates remain high. While numerous factors influence maternal health, research increasingly points to the decision-making power of women within households as a pivotal factor. Women's autonomy in health-related decisions not only affects their access to healthcare but also reflects broader gender dynamics that impact family and community health outcomes. This article delves into the role of women's household decision-making power concerning maternal health assistance, examining how education, socioeconomic status, and cultural norms interlink to affect health-related decisions and, ultimately, development.

assistance, and postnatal services. Autonomy in these areas can lead to better health practices, timely healthcare access, and improved health outcomes for both the mother and child. In many developing countries, however, men or extended family members traditionally hold the authority over healthcare decisions, which can limit women's access to timely and adequate maternal healthcare services.

Link to Maternal Health Outcomes

Studies indicate that when women have higher levels of autonomy, they are more likely to use prenatal care services, seek skilled attendance at birth, and access postnatal care. This increased usage is directly correlated with reduced rates of maternal and neonatal morbidity and mortality. For instance, a study in South Asia found that women who had more decision-making authority were nearly twice as likely to attend antenatal visits compared to those with limited autonomy [1]. Similarly, research in sub-Saharan Africa reveals that women's decision-making power significantly correlates with an increase in institutional deliveries, which are essential for managing complications during childbirth [2].

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN'S DECISION-MAKING POWER IN MATERNAL HEALTH

Understanding Decision-Making Power

In the context of maternal health, **decision-making power** refers to the autonomy women have in making choices regarding antenatal care, childbirth

III. FACTORS INFLUENCING WOMEN'S DECISION-MAKING POWER

1. Educational Attainment

Education is a primary driver of autonomy. Educated women are more likely to understand the importance of maternal health services and are better equipped to advocate for themselves within household dynamics. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), literacy and education also improve health literacy, which enables women to make informed health decisions. An educated mother is more likely to prioritize her health, attend regular checkups, and advocate for professional medical assistance during childbirth.

2. Economic Empowerment and Employment

Economic independence allows women greater influence over household finances, which can translate into decision-making power. Employed women, or those with their own income, tend to have more control over household spending, including healthcare expenses. Studies show that women with access to financial resources are more likely to seek and secure maternal health services [3]. Microfinance and financial inclusion programs targeting women in low-income communities have demonstrated success in increasing women's autonomy and healthcare utilization [4].

3. Cultural and Social Norms

In many communities, traditional norms dictate male dominance in household decision-making, particularly in healthcare. These norms often discourage women from asserting autonomy, especially in health-related matters. However, cultural shifts that promote gender equality, often driven by awareness campaigns or policy changes, have been associated with increased female autonomy. For instance, community-based programs in East Africa that address gender equality have positively impacted women's ability to make health-related decisions [5].

4. Access to Information and Healthcare Services

Women's access to healthcare information significantly impacts their decision-making power.

Programs that provide health education at the community level empower women with knowledge about maternal health, which can strengthen their confidence in making healthcare decisions. Telemedicine and mobile health information services have been particularly beneficial in rural areas, where traditional healthcare information may be limited [6].

IV. THE DEVELOPMENTAL IMPACT OF WOMEN'S DECISION-MAKING POWER ON MATERNAL HEALTH

Enhanced decision-making power for women in households has a ripple effect on various development goals. When women can make informed decisions about their health, they contribute not only to the well-being of their family but also to the broader socio-economic progress of their community and country. Increased maternal health leads to lower infant mortality rates, healthier families, and reduced healthcare costs. Countries that prioritize women's autonomy in healthcare see improvements in overall public health and development indicators, such as lower maternal mortality ratios and better child health outcomes.

Furthermore, empowering women in household decision-making is central to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality). Programs targeting women's empowerment in decision-making directly support these goals by addressing health inequalities and promoting sustainable family practices [7].

V. CONCLUSION

Women's decision-making power in households has far-reaching impacts on maternal health and broader development goals. Factors such as education, economic empowerment, and social norms significantly influence women's autonomy in healthcare choices, highlighting the need for policies that support women's empowerment in these areas. Increasing women's decision-making power aligns with public health objectives and development goals, creating pathways for healthier families and more resilient societies. Future policies and programs should continue to address these interconnected factors, promoting sustainable development through gender-sensitive approaches to healthcare.

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