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EVALUATION OF MEDIA NARRATIVES AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF MATERNAL MORTALITY RISK AMONG WOMEN IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Maternal mortality is the death of a woman during pregnancy, at child birth or 92 hours after child birth. it has been a torn on every nation's flesh, especially the nations of Africa and Nigeria in particular. Maternal mortality risk has been climbing even though there exist numerous messages on it, that is why this study was done to evaluate the media narratives and social constructions of maternal mortality risk among women in Enugu state, Nigeria. Survey research design was used in the study. The study was hinged on Framing theory of Communication and Multi-stage sampling technique was used to arrive at the final respondent for the work, population of female ranging from 18-49yrs at Enugu formed the population of the study. using Australian calculator to arrive at sample size of 382. findings from the study revealed that, there exist various social constructions and media narratives. The most used narrative as revealed in the study is human interest narrative, with radio being the most used medium to receive information on maternal mortality risk. The study also recommended among others that adequate media messages should be disseminated among women to counter already existing negative social constructions.

Keywords: Evaluation, media Narratives, Social Constructions, Maternal Mortality, Women.

Introduction

Maternal mortality risk has been an object of serious attention as it affects the population of a nation. Any nation without a robust population is tilting towards population disaster. World Health Organization as the death of a woman during pregnancy, childbirth or within 42 hours of childbirth. Contributory factors like haemorrhage, infection, sepsis, unsafe abortion and obstructed labour as stated by Chkwuezi (2010) the problem, WHO (2025) stated that in 2023, not less than 700 women around the world lose their lives daily from preventable causes related pregnancy and childbirth. With the developing countries accounting for the 90% of these deaths. This is quite scary; different organizations and government agencies have increased efforts to create awareness on the maternal mortality risk associated with childbirth. Yakubu et al (2024) observed that majority of the pregnant women used in the study have good knowledge of maternal mortality. Since women have good knowledge of maternal mortality, little wonder why some women still die in child birth. This is not far from some

social constructions through which women view the topic, social constructions according to Burr and Dick (2017) defined social construction as the way people understand and perceive the world is as a result of how the world is presented to them through their culture and tradition. This means that social constructions are those cultural and even religious factors that shape maternal mortality risk in Nigeria.

The media as an agent of change perform various functions in the society, from the inception of mass media as the medium of communication, the world never remains the same. Different organization and governmental agencies use various mass media channels to disseminate information on maternal mortality among women in Enugu state. Different media narratives are disseminated among these women, and the way they react to these messages, determines how they react to the messages. Igbinoba, et al (2020) suggested that media exposure influences the way the audience view maternal health, this show that the media is a powerful tool in the hands of the person that wilds it. that is why this study was aimed at evaluating how the media narratives and social constructions affect women's view on maternal mortality risk in Enugu state,

Statement of the Problem

Maternal mortality rate has been a torn on every nation's flesh, especially the nations of Africa and Nigeria in particular. Despite different intervention from governmental agencies and nongovernmental organization, the rate of maternal mortality continues to high. While a lot of attention has been focused on medical implication of the problem, little or no attention has been given to the media narratives in shaping people's perception regarding the matter. Nor has emphasizes being laid on the role social construction play in this subject. Media platforms play a significant role in shaping people's life and actions, that is why it is imperative to discover how these media platforms frame maternal mortality risk among women in Enugu State.

Enugu state with its deep cultural heritage, the role that social constructions play in the perception of maternal mortality should be studied. And since there is limited empirical research examining how women react to maternal mortality messages and how it affects their perception and the way they seek health care.

Objectives of the Study

The major objective of the study is to evaluate media narratives and social constructions of maternal mortality risk among women in Enugu state, while the following are the specific objectives. The study aims to:

1. Determine the angle of media narratives on maternal mortality disseminated among women in Enugu State
2. Identify various media channels through which women in Enugu state receive information on maternal mortality risk
3. Assess various social construction that increase the risk of maternal mortality among women in Enugu State
4. Evaluate how media narratives and social constructions affect maternal mortality among women in Enugu State

Literature Review

Media Overview

Media according to Miconi and Serra (2019), is defined as the domain of technological mediation; they come to play where immediate physical contacts ends. This means that the media in this context is the use of technological medium to transmit information to a large and scattered audience. The media is divided into: the broadcast media, print media and the new media.

Broadcast media: This is a form of communication that transmits information such as video and audio electronically to a large audience in form of air waves, through wire or by communication satellite, Simon (2024). The receiving audience receive the signals using their television sets and radio receivers.

Print media: This is one of the oldest forms of mass media that where information is shared in printed form. It includes the Newspapers, Magazines, Books, Brochures and billboards.
The New Media: According to Uduak (2021), new media is the type of communication that is made possible by the innovation in computer technology. It is usually delivered digitally and it includes the social media, blogs, email, and other forms of media that are delivered to the audience digitally.

Media Narrative on Maternal Mortality Risk

Media has shaped maternal mortality risk in through different narratives and they include the following:

1. **Call for Justice narrative:** the media through its narratives can framed issues on maternal mortality as a call for justice. United Nations Human Rights stated that every two minutes, a woman dies from preventable complications in pregnancy and childbirth, WHO (2025). These leading obstetric causes of maternal mortality are well known and can be treated. But in failing to do such, it tilts to a call of justice to strengthen the health system.
2. **International developmental gap narrative:** in doing this, the media can present maternal mortality risk from the angle of international development gap. WHO has already stated that the developing countries account for 90 percent of maternal mortality around the world. World Bank also ranked Nigeria 42 out 100 in delivery of universal health coverage. This is really a strong weak point where the developing countries like Nigeria can improve on.
3. **Self-blame game narrative:** this narrative is usually presented by the media where a pregnant woman is blamed when things go wrong in pregnancy or childbirth.
4. **Human interest narrative**: here, the media weave a story that touches the heart in order to appeal to people's emotions and the victim of maternal mortality as themselves.
5. **Gender inequality/gender-based violence issue**: this narrative is presented when women are treated badly even while they are in labour, or by intimate partners, women who are in abusive relationship are more likely to be victims of maternal mortality since they are unlikely to have to quality healthcare,
6. **System Failure/Public Health Crisis:** this happens when the media exposes the system failure in a bid to correct the failure. Tesfa et al (2025) observed that there are

unmet information needs and mass media exposure for maternal health among women, because the government is not doing enough. A good example is a particular video that went viral in March made by a nurse on duty in Uwani general hospital in Enugu. The nurse stated that there was no light, no generator, no fuel, no oxygen and a pregnant woman was in labour. The video showed a stark reality of public health facilities in Nigeria.

Social Constructions that Increase the Risk of Maternal Mortality

There are various social constructions that increase the risk of maternal mortality among women in Enugu state, and they include the following:

i. **Gender inequality:** some societies do not allow women to take some certain decisions over their reproductive. Health and this contributes to maternal mortality.
ii. **Early Marriage:** early marriage often lead to early pregnancy that may affect a woman's reproductive organs or even that may even prove fatal. A lot women are laden with age long ailment because their reproductive organs are not matured enough before they became pregnant.
iii. **Secrecy around marriage:** in many Igbo societies like Enugu, pregnancy is always shrouded in secrecy and this may make a pregnant woman not to get all the help she needs during gestation period or childbirth.
iv. **Illiteracy:** an educated woman view media messages differently from uneducated one. Illiteracy always has a way of making simple to things seem difficult.
v. **Poverty:** when a woman is poor, she may not be able to afford skilled health professional;. And this can increase the risk of maternal mortality.

Asogwa, et al (2021) in the study Women's Perceptions of the Causes of Maternal Mortality: Qualitative Evidence from Nsukka, Nigeria. The study was done to examine women's perception of causes of maternal mortality in Nsukka. It employed qualitative research design and findings from the study revealed that lack of education, superstition and poverty are factors that contributes to maternal mortality. The study also recommended that massive orientation and sensitization in the area of public health should be carried out to address the issues identified in the study.

While the study under review sought to examine women's perception of causes of maternal mortality in Nsukka, while the current study sought to evaluate media narratives and social constructions of maternal mortality risk among women in Enugu state. The study under review employed qualitative research design, while the current study employed quantitative research design. The geographical scope of the study under review is Nsukka, while the current study's geographical scope is Enugu state. Both studies however studied maternal mortality.

Okeke, (2020) did a study on the Social Factors Affecting Maternal and Child Health Care Services in Enugu East Local Government Area, Enugu State, Nigeria. The study was done to determine social factors that affect maternal and child health care services in Enugu East. Survey research design was used in the study with a sample size of 400. Findings from the study revealed that social factors affecting maternal and child health care services in Enugu East include income, accessibility of health care facilities, education, employment, gender inequality among others. The study also recommended that the government should make

sure that health care services should be made available and accessible for everybody and especially women within the childbearing age.

Aliyu, et al (2025). Traditional Birth Attendants Knowledge of Delivery and its Danger Signs: A One-on-One Interview was done to determine traditional birth attendant's knowledge of delivery and the dangers signs of labour and delivery. Qualitative research method was used and the interview was used to collect information for the study. Findings from the study suggests that although traditional birth attendants are able to take delivery safely, they were not aware of dangers signs of labour. The study recommended that traditional birth attendants should be trained on danger signs of labour and how to handle emergency situations.

The study under review sought to ascertain birth attendants' knowledge of delivery and their ability to recognize danger signs of labour, while the current study was done to evaluate media narratives and social constructions of maternal and mortality risk among women in Enugu state. Both studies dealt with maternal mortality, and while qualitative research method was used in the study under review, quantitative research design was used for the current study,

Igbinoba, et al (2020) in Women's Mass Media Exposure and Maternal Health Awareness in Ota, Nigeria. The study was done to the sources of maternal health awareness and women's level of exposure and maternal health awareness in Ota, Nigeria. The descriptive survey method of research design and the revealed that mass media exposure has a significant influence on maternal health awareness. The study also recommended that the goal of increasing the awareness on maternal health should be met with action.

While the study under review sought to assess the women's mass media exposure and maternal health awareness, the current study sought to evaluate media narrative and social constructions of maternal mortality risk. Both studies employed the same research design.

Theoretical Framework

This study is hinged on Framing theory of the mass media which was propounded by Erving Goffman in the year 1974 and it is based on the fact that the way information is presented in the media, influences how the audience interpret, react and understand it. it is based on selecting a certain aspects of reality and making them more noticeable or important in communication, the selected aspects then encourage audiences to understand an issue in a particular way.

This is how the media through its narratives presents issues on maternal mortality, to illicit a particular reaction on the audience. If the messages on maternal mortality is framed to make the women accept that it is a major public - health crisis, or an avoidable tragedy; a consequnce of inadequate healthcare; a woman's reproductive health problem; a rural health problem or a failure of government policy. Alot of women will perceive maternal mortality base on those media narratives as the major source of risk.

Methodology

Enugu State situated at the gate of the east has several commercial, industrial, educational establishments. No wonder it has a high population. The research population comprises the number of reproductive women in the state within the age of 18 -49.

According to 2006 census, the population of Enugu State is 3,267,837 and the population of female is 1,671,795. Out of this lot 856,962 females are between the age 18 and 49. Using Owuamalam (2012) population projection formula as recommended by United Nations Development (UNDP). The estimated population projection for women between the age of 18 and 49 is 1,486,340.

Multi staged sampling technique was used to arrive at final respondents used for the study. Population of the study was initially clustered into Local Government Area, simple random sampling was used to choose towns and proportionate sampling technique was used to allocate questionnaires to the chosen communities.

Australian calculator was used to arrive at 382 sample size, and the instrument for data collection was face validated by two experts in Mass Communication Department.

Presentation of Data

Here, data were analyzed based on the number of the dully filled out and returned copies of the questionnaire. Out of the 382 copies of the questionnaire sent out for this study, 346 was dully filled out and returned. Therefore, the analysis in this study is based on 346 copies of the questionnaire.

Table I - Research Objective 1: Angles through which the media presents it narratives on maternal mortality among women in Enugu State.

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD
1	Human interest narratives	69 19.9%	116 33.6%	90 26%	71 20-5%
2	System failure/Public health crisis	126 36.4%	163 47.1%	36 10.4%	21 6.1%
3	Call for justice	84 24.3%	161 46.5%	74 21.4%	27 7.8%
4	Self-blame	60 17.3%	48 13.9%	168 48.6%	70 20.2%
5	Gender inequality/gender-based violence	91 26.3%	103 29.8%	66 19.1%	86 24.8%

Table 1 shows that there are different angles the media uses to disseminate information on maternal mortality risk among women in Enugu state. It is worthy of note that a lot women in Enugu state agree human interest angle, public health crisis and gender based violence are the angles mostly used by the media as can be seen from the data presented above. Although a fraction of the sample size agree that the media present a self blame while disseminating information on maternal mortality risk, majority of the sample said otherwise.

Table 2: Research Objective 2: Various Media Channels Through Which Information On Maternal Mortality Risk Is Disseminated Among Women In Enugu State

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD
6	Social media	100 28.9%	128 37%	56 16.2%	62 17.9%
7	Television	65 18.8%	80 23.1%	108 31.2%	92 26.9%
8	Newspaper	42 12.1%	50 14.5%	136 39.3%	118 34.1%
9	Radio	132 38.2%	98 28.3%	76 22%	40 11.6%

Table 2 shows that various media channels were used to disseminate information on maternal mortality risk among women in Enugu state, it is worthy of note that the most used channel is radio, followed by social media and trailed television and newspaper. This shows that a lot of women in Enugu state receive information on maternal mortality risk through the radio.

Table 3- Objective 3: Various Social Constructions that Increase the Risk of maternal Mortality among Women in Enugu State

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD
10	Poverty	98 28,3%	132 38.2%	91 26.3$	25 7.2%
11	Early marriage	64 18.5%	68 19%	106 30.6%	108 31.2%
12	Illiteracy	162 46.8%	94 27.1%	60 17.3%	30 8.8%
13	Superstition	146 42.2%	100 28.9%	56 16.2%	44 12.7%

Table 3 shows that there exist various social constructions that increase the risk of maternal mortality among women in Enugu state. A good number of the sample size agree that illiteracy, poverty and superstition contributes to the increase of the risk associated with maternal mortality. Illiteracy scored the highest, followed by superstition. Therefore, women in Enugu state agree that when one is not educated, the person stands a higher chance of being a victim maternal mortality risk, when compared with her educated counterpart.

Table 4 Research Objective 4: How Media Narratives and Social Constructions affects Maternal Mortality Risk among Women in Enugu State

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD
14	It made me to seek skilled medical attendants when pregnant	106 30.6%	98 28.3%	82 23.7%	60 17.4%
15	It made me to keep visiting traditional health attendants because they are more experienced	66 19.1%	58 16.7%	131 37.9%	91 26.3%

16	It made me to notice danger signs associated with labour and birth	161 46.5%	86 24.9%	42 12.1%	57 16.5%
17	It made me to demand for better healthcare	126 36.4%	66 19.1%	84 24.3%	70 20.2%

Table 4 shows that media narratives and various social constructions affect how women in Enugu state react to maternal mortality risk. A good number of the sample size agree that they now seek the service of skilled medical attendants while pregnant. Although a small fraction of the sample size still agree that they still visit traditional birth attendants, it is worthy of note that majority do not agree with that assertion. It is also good to deduce from the table that the majority of the respondents agree that the awareness made them to demand for better healthcare and as well as recognize danger signs of labour.

Discussion of Findings

Based on research objective one which is on the angle of media narratives used to disseminate information on maternal mortality, public health crisis angle generated the highest as collated from the questionnaire. This means that the media framed the stories on the subject matter around public health crisis to prompt the government to do the needful.

This finding is inline with framing theory which posits that the way a message is presented in the media, determines how the audience reacts to it.

The finding on the objective two which is base on the media channels used in dissemination of messages on maternal mortality risk. It was observed that radio was the most channels to receive these messages, followed by the social media. This means that the ubiquitous nature of radio made it accessible to women in Enugu state.

This finding is not in line with Igbinabo et al (2020) which suggest that the most used channel of transmission of maternal issues is social media.

The finding on objective three which is aimed at various social constructions that increase the risk of maternal mortality, it was observed that illiteracy ranked the highest, followed by superstition and poverty.

This finding is in line with Okeke (2020), which revealed that there exist various social factors that contributes to the risk of maternal health, it is also in line with the framing theory which posits that the way something is presented in the media, determines how the audience react to it,

The finding on objective 4 which is based on how media narratives and social constructions affect maternal mortality risk among women in Enugu state. Findings from the study revealed that after receiving these messages, these women agreed to seek skilled medical help and also demand better medical care when they are pregnant.

This finding is in line with the framing theory which shows that these women were shaped in this direction because of the effect of the media.

Conclusion

Looking at the statistics of maternal mortality rate, a lot of questions are raised. Knowing that Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, we have a reputation to keep. Therefore, efforts should be geared towards doing everything possible to the nation's robust population. That is why all hands must be on deck to do everything possible to reduce maternal mortality risk in Nigeria.

Recommendations

In line with the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The media should use appropriate narrative when reporting on the issue of maternal mortality in order to reduce its impact.
2. Appropriate media channels should be used in order to reach the target audience of maternal mortality in order to achieve communication fidelity.
3. Nongovernmental organization and governmental agencies should create awareness on the negative effects of social constructions in order to break its barriers .
4. Efforts should be made by all stalk holders to make the mdia to channel its messages towards dismantling negative social constructions.

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