

The Race to Save Women's Lives:
Improvement in Maternal Health and Lifestyle

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Introduction:

Women's health and lifestyles in developing countries yields a great myriad of disturbing statistics. Women in developing countries are suffering physically and emotionally – frequently at the expense of complete male dominant societies - in comparison to women in already developed countries; who live in opulence and pleasure. The following story portrays the horrible condition of these women's everyday lives.

In a Tanzanian village a woman named Elena began to go into labor. Once the pain became unbearable, she sent for her aunt to assist her with the labor and delivery. The husband, too poor to afford a hospital visit, called a birth attendant to assist his wife, Elena. But, by the time the attendant finally arrived, the baby had already died in the birth canal. At this point, Elena, who was passed out and bleeding profusely, was carried to the nearest health center on a mattress tied between two bikes. The doctor was able to save her life, but because of labor complications a fistula - a tearing of the tissue between the vagina and rectum - had formed. This specific condition causes urinary and fecal incontinence (Coeytaux, 2010, p. 36).

In these developing countries, especially Africa, not only are women subjected to this, but girls as young as eight years old are subjected to similarly hazardous circumstances. In essence, girls who have not even gone through puberty yet are exposed to the same abuse and neglect as these poor women. (Khaled, 2008, p.1). In addition to the constant abuse and neglect that these women go through, they are continuously subject to other health hazards such as malnutrition, lack of personal hygiene, and sexually transmitted diseases (STD's).

In order to help improve these women's lives, these actions need to be implemented:

1. Men and women alike, in these developing countries, need to be educated on the importance of proper health and disease prevention; especially in relation to intercourse and maternity;

2. People in general need to be made aware of these horrible conditions and their effects so that we can help improve these women's lives;
3. An organization needs to be funded and created to specifically help women in these developing countries.

If these actions are taken women's lives in developing countries will greatly improve.

I. Disease Prevention and Health Education

While researching about women's health in developing countries, it was discovered how little disease prevention and proper health care is a part of these women's lives. Unsanitary conditions and lack of contraceptives is a major problem, especially in regards to conception and maternal health. When it comes to using or not using contraceptives, we found three main things that influence these couples' decisions in using them. First, they don't know about them or want to use them. Second, a lot of the time these couples don't have the extra funds or access to such commodities. Third, women are usually dominated by their husbands and do not have the authority to insist the use of contraceptives (Tinker, 2000, p. 151).

Through education provided in America, people have learned there are a countless number of infectious diseases that can be spread through intercourse. So, in these developing countries, STD's and infections are a huge issue, especially for women who have not been educated. Because of a woman's biological structure, she is much more susceptible to these kinds of diseases (Tinker, 2000, p. 150). In these countries, these diseases are spreading like wild fire and the people do not know it. They also do not have the resources to stop it.

Poor prenatal and pregnancy care in these countries leave women more susceptible to malaria, HIV, heart disease, and diabetes. (Filippi et al, 2006, p. 4). Women not only are more vulnerable to STD's, but because of cultural issues, she cannot demand fidelity in her husband. For every one man with an HIV infection, there are 6 women infected. Unsafe sex also accounts for more than one-third of the total disease burden of women in Africa. (Tinker, 2000, p.150).

Another problem is that these women are malnourished. Because of continual malnutrition, women in these developing countries are more susceptible diseases and 450 million of these adult women have stunted growth. This not only affects the mothers, but it also affects their children. Fifty-one percent of these women are anemic due to an iron deficiency in their diet, which also results in pregnancy complications (Tinker, 2000, p. 150 & 155). So, with each succeeding generation, these women's health is getting worse and worse. When these women's girls have children, their maternal health will be even worse than their mothers. Slowly, these women's health is dwindling away, and nothing is being done about it.

II. Awareness of Maternal Health

In regard to maternal health, these women are suffering unspeakable horrors and risking their lives to bear children. More than one-third of women have no contact with any medical professional until birth (Coeytaux, 2010, p.38). This means any life threatening complications that can cause death to the mother during labor are not detected. Complications of pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death and disability among women of the reproductive age in developing countries. As of 2000, 1 out of 7 women in Africa have died in labor or in relation to pregnancy (Tinker, 2000, p. 150,) compared to 1 in every 7,300 women in developed countries.

Fifty-seven percent of the women in the Middle East do not have a skilled attendant to assist with their labor, and deliveries most commonly happen within the confines of their own homes. The truth is, these women do not have the funds to go to a hospital (Coeytaux, 2010, p.36). If a woman is fortunate to have any medical procedure to help correct the result of a birth complication, it costs the family dearly; almost 26% of their yearly income to compensate for the procedure. (Filippi, 2006, p. 1).

One of the birth complications women commonly suffer from is called a vesicovaginal fistula- a tearing of the tissue between the vagina and rectum causing unrelenting, continuous urinary and fecal discharge. Social consequences of fistula include rejection from society,

isolation, and desertion from husband and family, which causes them severe psychological damage. Women become depressed, feel ashamed and lonely because of this fistula. Even if the fistula is repaired, complex bladder dysfunction and urethral sphincter incontinence often results (Coeytaux, 2010, p.36).

9.5 million women in Africa suffer from pregnancy related illness- like the vesicovaginal fistula- 1.4 million suffer near death events in child delivery, and 20 million women suffer long term disabilities as a result of birth complications (Filippi et al, 2006, p. 2). Almost all of these occur because of the lack of professional care, and because a lack of attention to personal sanitation.

Complications of pregnancy and childbirth are the leading cause of death and disability among women of the reproductive age in developing countries. If maternal health is improved, the leading cause of death in Africa will vanish.

III. Plan of Action

After realizing all of the atrocities that women in developing countries go through, it was decided that an organization needs to be funded and created designed specifically to help these women. That may sound like a nearly impossible task to accomplish, mainly because of how much it would cost. But experts estimate that: "To deliver services needed, it would only cost \$1.50 per person living in the 75 countries where 95 percent of the maternal deaths occur" (Coeytaux, 2010, p. 41). So, if the families within these countries would give just a little bit, or even if more prosperous countries would help fund these underdeveloped countries, the funding part would be taken care of. Volunteers could pitch in, anyone who is looking for a good service opportunity, to help create this organization.

The organization's next step would be to gather supplies and begin building proper health care facilities. These buildings wouldn't need to be some master architecture; it could just be a simple building that is properly cleaned and well maintained. Supplies could be gathered through donations, or they could be bought using the monetary donations that were

spoken of earlier. Also, to make these facilities more accessible, transportation could be provided; whether it is donated automobiles such as trucks or jeeps, or if the local towns and cities would be willing to hire people specifically to drive community-provided vehicles. But, if people don't feel comfortable with going to the clinics, free classes at the facilities could be offered to the local midwives. It would then be the midwives who could go around to the local towns and cities to offer their services to their friends and families.

To help the organization help these women out, information about proper maternal health care and personal hygiene would need to be publicized throughout the local communities. Women and girls would need to be taught proper feminine hygiene, the importance of receiving consistent prenatal care, and consuming all of the proper vitamins and nutrients. These women need to first be taught how they can best take care of themselves.

Another major issue that needs to be addressed is that the men and boys need to be educated on the importance of taking care of these women, and helping them realize how the community as a whole will be benefited from it. Men and husbands need to know that if their wives, sisters, aunts, etc. are taken care of, especially during maternity, that their lives and every one's lives around them will greatly improve. The local communities will be more self-sustaining, citizens will be able to better contribute to their society, and as a result their economy would be more likely to succeed. It may be difficult to convince an aged man of this, so the young men and boys in the community would need to also be taught the importance of properly treating their mothers and sisters. The young men and boys should also be taught the idea that they themselves cannot succeed without the help of women, so they should learn how to become proper gentlemen. If the men can be taught how to help out the women, then a volunteer organization's task will be much more possible.

Conclusion:

In a developed and educated society, it is common logic that a successful sovereignty cannot succeed without the help of its women. In order for the women to be capable of sustaining their communities, they need to be taken care of first; especially mothers. Without mothers and women, progress would halt and even begin to digress.

That is why it is so important that these undeveloped countries learn the concept of proper respect and care for their women. These underprivileged mothers and women need to be properly cared for and nurtured. They need to be educated on how to take care of themselves and they need to know the positive results of these actions. Not only will these women and communities be saving the lives of millions of women, but they will begin to help their communities start moving in a better direction.

Everyone will benefit if the rest of the world would realize that women are just as important as men. A special emphasis needs to be put on mothers. If women in their pregnancy are properly supported and watched over, the results would be exponential. It is time that the world starts taking care of its mothers.

References:

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