

## Pregnant Women's Access to Antenatal Care amid Covid 19: The Case of Two Ghanaian Women

### Introduction

The covid 19 pandemic has exposed weak societal systems around the world. Institutions have had to quickly adapt to the challenges the pandemic present in order to deal with it. Health institutions and facilities have not been spared. Health facilities are struggling to stand on their feet in order to deal with the complex and multifaceted challenges of covid 19. Issues of lack of personal protective equipment for health workers lingers on.

Prior to covid 19, health systems were dealing with diverse issues that affected women and girls especially those who were pregnant. Aside the financial hardships that most pregnant women and girls experience during the period of their obstetric care, issues of abuse and disrespect abounds. Due to covid 19 and its related measures to curb the spread, the challenges that pregnant women and girls go through have exacerbated.

### The case of two pregnant women in Accra

Priscilla is a 21 year old young woman who is five (5) months pregnant. She resides at Bukuom, in the Ashiedu Keteke Sub-metropolitan district in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. She is a make-up artist and recounts her antenatal care experience during this covid 19 period. She visits the Jamestown Maternity, in the Ashiedu Keteke district, which is about 10 minutes' walk from her place of residence for her antenatal care. She reveals that the cost of visiting the facility has increased during this covid 19 period as compared to the period prior to covid 19.

"We were made to pay 5 Ghana Cedis before we are given drugs prior to covid 19. And now, I have to spend 35 Ghana Cedis to buy the same quantity of drugs", she says.

Priscilla reveals that drugs were not always available to them prior to covid 19 and the situation is the same during covid 19. In order to stay healthy and ensure same for her unborn child, she takes the prescription for medicines and purchase them at a Pharmacy. She indicates that prior to covid 19, pregnant women did not pay for hospital cards; currently, they do pay. A scan prior to covid 19 was about 5 Ghana Cedis but now pregnant women pay 30 Ghana Cedis for it. Prior to covid 19, Priscilla says she could go for ANC with 100 Ghana Cedis and return



home with some balance, but now, she is left with no money after a visit. She takes money from her partner to supplement hers whenever she has to go for ANC. During days that she does not get any money, she retorts that:

"I stay home and work till I am able to get some of the money to return to the clinic".

With regard to confidentiality and privacy, Priscilla indicates that their ANC visits are handled with the utmost confidentiality and privacy. However, staff are rude to them.

"They are rude to us because of the times that we are in because they are so careful with themselves so that they do not get infected, by so doing I'm not well taken care of. They speak offensively to me just because I have not adjusted my nose mask well"

Priscilla reckons that things have been extremely strict at the health facility due to covid 19 thereby making visits uncomfortable for pregnant women. However, she believes that pregnant women should not be deterred from going for their routine ANC visits.

"Although it is advisable that frequent hospital visits should be avoided at the time of covid 19, it is important that we have our ANC visits and deliver our child in a health facility in order to have the best outcomes for ourselves and babies"

Priscilla suggests that an appointment based system should be used to schedule pregnant women for ANC visits instead of allowing every pregnant woman to visit the facility as and when they wanted. That way, their exposure to covid 19 will be reduced.

29 years old Diana is a trader and resides at Anunsa in the Ashiedu Keteke Sub-Metro. Prior to covid 19, she visited the Usher Polyclinic for her ANC. She was however referred to the Korle Bu Polyclinic for further attention and that is where she currently go for ANC visits. The Korle Bu Polyclinic is a 20 minutes' walk from home.

Diana informs that medicines are not available to them (pregnant women) whenever they visit the facility prior to covid 19. A prescription is given to them to purchase the medicine from a pharmacy. However, during this covid 19 period, medicines like folic acid, vitamin c and calcium are available to them but her NHIS card does not cover the cost of those medicines.

Laboratory services like HIV, malaria and blood group tests are available. Her only challenge with laboratory services is that there are always lots of people at the laboratory. This keeps them waiting for a long time before it gets to their turn.

Diana mentions that the cost of ANC visit has increased during this covid 19 period. Unfortunately, due to covid 19, her petty trading has not been going well which makes it difficult to get money for medical care. On days that she does not have money for ANC visits, she borrows money to attend the hospital. She mentions that she has lost a baby before and so this time she does everything possible to generate funds for her ANC visits.

Health workers did not apportion ample time to attend to her needs during ANC visits prior to covid 19 and the situation is worse now. She believes health workers are in a hurry to attend to other clients. Diana mentions that she is in a dilemma as to whether to attend her ANC visits or not. She is in constant fear of contracting covid 19 which may have dire consequences on her pregnancy.

## Conclusion

While it is true that health facilities are overwhelmed during this covid 19 period, it is inexcusable for any facility to melt out inhumane and inappropriate actions towards women and girls especially pregnant women and girls. It is imperative to safeguard pregnant women during this covid 19 period to ensure the best outcomes for them and their babies.

Pregnant women should not be deterred from visiting health facilities during this pandemic. Ample time to address the needs of all pregnant women should be apportioned to ensure that the world does not record high cases of maternal mortality during this covid 19 period.



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