

Perception, Preference and Practices of Pregnant Women Towards the Choice of Public or Private Health Facility for Antenatal Care Services in Makurdi, Benue State

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: This study assessed the perception, preference, and practices of pregnant women in Makurdi, Benue State, regarding their choice between public and private health facilities for antenatal care (ANC) services. Antenatal care (ANC) is a crucial aspect of maternal health that significantly contributes to the reduction of maternal and neonatal morbidity and mortality.

Methodology: A quantitative cross-sectional design was employed using structured questionnaires administered to 400 pregnant women, 200 from public and 200 from private health facilities. A two - staged technique of stratified and systematic sampling techniques were used to ensure fair representation.

Results: Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and chi-square tests to determine relationships between socio-demographic characteristics and ANC-related outcomes. Findings revealed that the majority (81%) of respondents had a positive perception of ANC services in both public and private facilities, though private facilities received slightly higher approval (46%) due to efficiency, individualized care, and responsiveness. Public facilities were appreciated mainly for affordability and accessibility but faced challenges of long waiting times and perceived poor staff attitude. Preference patterns showed that 27% of respondents had no fixed choice, while 41% preferred public and 32% private facilities. Practices reflected flexibility, with less than one-third of respondents relying exclusively on either public (18%) or private (13%), about 24% combining both sectors and 45% switching based on need and circumstance. Socio-demographic factors such as education, income, marital status, occupation, and residence significantly influenced perception, preference, and practices. Educated and higher-income women tended to favor private care emphasizing quality and respectful treatment.

Conclusion: The study concludes that ANC utilization in Makurdi is driven by pragmatic considerations rather than fixed loyalties, highlighting the need to improve staff training, infrastructure, and service delivery in public facilities while promoting affordability and accessibility in private ones to enhance maternal health outcomes.

