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# Women's Health; Overcoming the Challenges of Ensuring a Healthy Status as a Professional Woman, Wife and Mother



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## Abstract

Health is Wealth! And a healthy woman is the bedrock of the society; women are central to healthy families, and ultimately healthy communities. Losing a mother in childbirth deprives a family of income and any surviving children of nutrition and education. Overcoming the challenges of ensuring a healthy status while combining a career with raising a family is discussed in this treatise. Mental and social health are often overlooked while physical health is relegated to the background except when symptoms ensue. The ability to have a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being cannot be over emphasized. This treatise highlights tips on how to achieve this status.

## Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) in April 7, 1948, defined Health as "A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". The fact that the definition has not been amended ever since confirms that it is comprehensive and has thus stood the test of time. This definition implies that Women's Health should not only be viewed by the presence or absence of disease or infirmity – genital tract infections, endometriosis, diabetes mellitus, cancers, hypertension, and so on, but should also incorporate issues which compromise one's mental and social well-being which for women include the abuse, violence, discrimination, neglect and the dependency that they suffer as well as the extent of their economic prowess. Women need to be healthy in order to realize their full potential. As aptly put by Sir Winston Churchill, "Healthy citizens are the greatest asset any country can have" [1]. Improving access and quality of health services for women is not only the right investment to make, but it is also a cost-effective investment. The sustainable development Goal 3 promises to 'Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages' by 2030, underscores the need of health and well-being for all [2].

## Discussion

It is imperative that women stay healthy. The highest attainable standard of health is a fundamental right of every person. Gender-based discrimination, however, emasculates this right. It can render women more susceptible to sickness and

less likely to obtain care, for reasons ranging from affordability to social conventions keeping the home. In Nigeria for example, as shown in Table 1, the health indices are quite dismal. With high total fertility rates, low contraceptive prevalence, poor utilization of existing services (antenatal, delivery, postnatal, family planning, cancer screening), and poor social support services such as water, basic hygiene, electricity, etc, the scenario is abysmal. Behaviour changes which have adopted sedentary life styles coupled with a loss of cultural values, increasing violence, moral decadence with increasing rates of sexual abuses and sexual violence have worsened the picture.

**Table 1:** Estimates in maternal, neonatal and child health indicators in Nigeria, 2013.

Indicator	2013 Estimates
Population	166.2 Million
Total Fertility rate	5.38
Contraceptive Prevalence Rate (modern method)	10.0%
Annual number of Births	6,458,000
Maternal mortality rate per 100,000 live births	630
Absolute numbers of annual maternal deaths	40,000
Still-birth Mortality Rate/1000 live births	42
Neonatal Mortality rate/1000 Live births	39
Percentage (%) of pregnant women not receiving antenatal care	36
Percentage (%) of women delivering at home	58

Worldwide, Women's health is advocated for. It is a recognized fact that women need to be healthy in order to realize their full potential. The current United Nations (UN) transformative goal on gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment is grounded in the commitment by UN Member States to gender equality and advancing women's rights. These commitments are enshrined in global treaties, most notably the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) [3]; in policy commitments such as the Programme of Action agreed at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) [4], the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 [5] and the resulting Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and, more recently, the outcome of Rio+20. Also, in relevant outcomes of the General Assembly (GA), including the Millennium Declaration which led to the creation of the MDGs; in the resolutions of the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC); and, in the agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) [6], including, most recently, on the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls at CSW 57 and advancing women worldwide at CSW 59.

Similarly, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a platform for the enhancement of the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) of girls and women, especially in Africa. The SDGs goals and targets such as those related to health, education and gender equality encompass many key aspects of SRHR of adolescents and women which include access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services, comprehensive sexuality education and the ability to make decisions about their own health. SDGs adopt a framework that explicitly recognizes how integrally important enhancing SRHR is to achieving its larger goals. Extant evidence reveals that girls have enormous potential to contribute to world development and its sustainability. It has also been shown that girls' involvement is a prerequisite to the achievement of development and sustainability. The Sustainable Development Goals thus ride on this and emphasize the role that girls can and do play in achieving the vision for 2030.

Central to the efforts of the SDGs is the recognition of gender equality as an indivisible and vital condition necessary to the achievement of the overarching 2030 Agenda. It emphasizes the indispensable need to end all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls everywhere, to put a stop to harmful practices like child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation, and to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights. Women are key stakeholders in the implementation and accountability of the SDGs and represent a population group that cannot be left behind if the goals agreed to in Agenda 2030 are to be met. Women are formidable agents for change with enormous potential to change realities for themselves, their friends, families, communities, and countries. Despite this, women remain one of the most marginalized populations in the world, and live in poverty. The end of poverty can only be achieved

with the end of gender-based discrimination. All over the world, gender inequality makes and keeps women poor, depriving them of basic rights and opportunities for well-being. Women make significant contributions every day from bringing an income to her household as an employed wage earner, to creating jobs as an entrepreneur, to taking care of her family and elders. Poverty comes with many risks and discrimination leaves women less resilient to these. In an economic downturn, poor women are less likely to have savings and abilities to make up for lost income. Women have a right to equal access to all avenues to end poverty, from social protection safety nets to use of the latest technology. Thus, the SDGs promise to put an end to hunger, by achieving food security via the promotion of sustainable agriculture, providing training for the women farmers, access to information and technology and other strategies which will enable women in Africa to get the nutrients they need, to manage the physical demands of pregnancy and breastfeeding, to continue the reproductive cycle and to see to the sustainability of the universe is a welcome development.

The promises of the SDGs to eliminate gender disparities in the education sector and to ensure equal access at all levels particularly for vulnerable girls and women further buttresses this fact. It is expected that the goal will provide the much-needed knowledge and skills to promote sustainable development, promote culture of peace and non-violence, create opportunities for the vulnerable to exercise the right to human dignity. The SDG promises to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages through universal access to sexual and reproductive health care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes. This will bring about a drastic reduction in maternal mortality ratio (MMR), infant mortality rate (IMR), unmet need for contraceptive, non-utilization of antenatal care (ANC), STI/HIV, and enhance the wellbeing of adolescents and women. Abstract commitments made on paper are however not nearly enough. The need for quick and effective steps toward implementation is urgent, particularly in the stark shadow of normalized and unacceptable human rights abuses faced by some of the most vulnerable populations in the world. Underscoring this is the personal effort of women to rise and change their narrative. Career advancement can be stressful and time consuming but education is one of the surest way to empower women. A wife has duties to fulfill and so does a mother. A mother bears, rears and cares for the family and by extension the society. Therefore, staying healthy as a professional woman, wife and mother implies not only the absence of disease, as we know but also optimum physical, mental and social wellbeing in our careers, family, love life and society.

Breast and Cervical Cancers are two common cancers that affect women. They are however the same cancers that can be prevented from occurring as well as the same cancers whose mortality and morbidity rates can be vastly reduced when early

detection mechanisms are utilized for quick identification and management. As responsible women, the monthly breast self-examination and routine Papanicolaou Smear are basic elements for preventing invasive cancer.

Maternal death, together with the problems that surround it, has become a yardstick by which the quality of Women's Health is appraised – the role of antenatal care and delivery with a skilled birth attendant are antidotes to this dreaded scourge. Awareness creation remains a bedrock for prevention strategies and awareness of danger signs in pregnancy cannot be over emphasized [7,8]. Women should encourage one another and share best practices. All pregnant women should attend antenatal clinics and deliver at a well-equipped health facility with a skilled birth attendant. Families should be planned and unwanted pregnancies avoided through abstinence or contraception - natural or with medications. Natural Contraception with evidence-based scientific methods is now available. Examples include the cyclebead and the icyclebead [9,10].

### **Physical Health as a professional woman, wife & mother**

Health promotional activities such as exercises and avoidance of sedentary living and stress, appropriate feeding and avoidance of smoking and alcohol will contribute to staying healthy through a reduction in the risk of non-communicable diseases. Adopting behaviours such as ensuring a safe and clean environment, safe disposal of wastes including faeces, drinking safe water, appropriate hand washing will reduce the incidence of communicable diseases. Dietary discipline, regular exercises and embracing lifestyle modification is key to great physical looks and sexual health as well as an antidote to Diabetes, Hypertension, Cancers, Genital Tract Infections, etc. Sexual responsibilities should not be neglected. Pelvic floor exercises are important amongst other things. Life style modification and dietary discipline are essential. Women should eat to live! Improved nutrition along with 30 minutes of exercise three to five times per week reduces cardiovascular illness and deaths by 50% and colorectal cancer by 40%.

### **Mental Health as a professional woman, wife & mother**

Work imbalance; housework, office-work, career advancement efforts, Emotional imbalance; marital and extramarital relationships as well as religious and moral inclination all lead to stress and exhaustion and affects a woman's mental health. Creating a balance arises from the knowledge that success in any endeavor starts from planning and the realization that failure to plan is failure assured should create an impetus that galvanizes one into action. Each day should be planned to strike a balance in one's endeavors and back it up with prayers. Efforts should be made to combat the stress of daily living, which reduces productivity, depresses the immune system and generally renders the body to be more prone to ill health, by engaging in various forms of relaxations – recreational sports, watching

movies, taking internal and external holidays. Furthermore, it helps to have a positive attitude to life and a hobby outside one's main profession, in addition to being creative, innovative and happy. Adherence to a religious belief when practiced faithfully results in internal peace and is an effective antidote to stress and the vicissitudes of earthly existence.

In Society, an attempt to bring to light the many unfair treatments that are meted out to women immediately leads to a paradox [11]. All men were born of women and without women, no man could have been born; yet men are at the forefront of the discriminatory actions against women [12]. Male children should be brought up properly and female discrimination kicked against. Hard work and excellence should be encouraged by rewarding doggedness! Women should lead by example in their offices. In our societies, women, often as mothers-in-law, themselves encourage, insist on, and propagate the obnoxious cultural practices that so badly dehumanise their fellow women especially those that become widows; denying them access to their late husband's property, and encouraging dehumanising cultural practises.

In summary, prevention of diseases and management of Infirmary is imperative. Early detection and appropriate treatment is necessary to limit consequences. Enhanced social, economic and mental wellbeing is only possible in a healthy individual. The relationship between economic empowerment and health is key. To ensure access to health care, economic provisions should be made. Adults must work hard to reduce overweight and obesity with their attendant complications.

In conclusion, a healthy professional, wife and mother is possible. Routine health checks, a planned and balance day, dietary discipline, regular exercises make for the right health behavior. Women should remember their sexual responsibilities, and be kind to fellow women. The sustainable development goal is a wakeup call to engender the right and human dignity of girls and women. The reproductive and sexual health concern of girls and women that has been deliberately relegated for several decades can be redeemed by the SDGs. Women can be supported to live a happy and fulfilled life devoid of discrimination, sexual abuses or exploitations, injustice, equal access to economic, political and reproductive health services.

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