

# “The Message is the Manner”: The Role of Supportive Communication in Improving Pap Screening in North-Central Nigeria



Author: Nancin Dadem  
Advisor: Dr. Christina Beck



## Background

- Cervical cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in Nigerian women, with 12,075 new cases & 7,968 deaths in 2020 (WHO, 2020).
- Africa south of the Sahara bears about 70% of the global burden of cervical cancer (Musa et al., 2017).
- The human papilloma virus (HPV) is the causative agent in cervical cancer and the most common sexually transmitted virus (Aral & Holmes, 2008).

## Methods

- This presentation reports data collected at two research sites in North-Central Nigeria.
- Data consisted of 63 in-depth individual interviews with women aged 25 and above, located in the study sites.



Map of Nigeria Showing Study Locations

- Investigation focused on:
  - Women’s knowledge and experiences with cervical cancer and pap screening to identify supportive attributes that facilitated the uptake of pap screening in the female target population.
- An iterative approach was used to abductively synthesize and analyze data using explicit theories of Social Support, PEN-3, and Health Belief to identify themes of meanings (Tracy, 2019).

## Results

- High awareness and uptake of pap screening but poor knowledge on the causes and risk factors of cervical cancer.
- Motivation to screen from interpersonal networks:
  - Healthcare providers’ recommendation.
  - Admonition from family and friends – women assumed the role of informants and persuaders, and served as linkage to pap screening services.
  - Groups’ proactiveness – creating cervical cancer and pap screening awareness.
- Perceived barriers to pap screening are five-level layered:
  - Individual – e.g., low information;
  - Interpersonal – e.g., perceived stigma and courtesy stigma;
  - Community – cultural and religious beliefs and expectations;
  - Organizational/Structural – high cost of screening and rural locations; and
  - Societal/Public Policy – poor societal investment
- Strategies to communication – supportive agents in social networks, public media, informative messages, appropriate language, and politeness.

## Key Takeaways

- Implication: Supportive communication will be central in increasing knowledge and uptake of existing pap screening services to curb cervical cancer illness and deaths in Nigeria.
- Theoretically: Resources and influences through interpersonal and group communication in women’s social networks and provider-patient interactions enhanced women’s decision to screen for the disease. Hence, results illustrate the postulations of Social Support and its value in problem prevention.
- Practically: Insights from this study can serve as building blocks for constructing interpersonal and group communication interventions, and improving pap screening practices to increase uptake.

## References

Aral, S. O., & Holmes, K. K. (2008). The epidemiology of STIs and their social and behavioral determinants: Industrialized and developing countries. In Holmes, K.K., Sparling, P.F., Stamm, W. E., et al. (Eds.), *Sexually Transmitted Diseases* (4<sup>th</sup> ed., pp. 53-92). McGraw Hill. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/9781118251128.ch11>

Musa, J. (2017). The need for societal investment to improve cervical cancer outcomes in Nigeria: A commentary. *African Journal of Reproductive Health & Research*, 21(4), 17-23. <https://www.ajhr.org/issue/ajhr20170406>

Tracy, S. J. (2019). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact* (2nd ed.). Wiley Blackwell.

World Health Organization. (2020, January). *Global cancer observatory (GLOBOCAN) fact sheets*. <https://gco.iarc.fr/today/data/index.php?cancer/21/Cervix/stati-fact-sheet.pdf>

## Acknowledgements

Funders: Ohio University Council on Research, Scholarship, and Creative Writing (student enhancement award); Graduate College and Graduate Student Senate (original work grant); Scripps Diversity Committee (graduate dissertation grant award); and Communication Studies Endah Agustiana & Rudi Sakardar International Travel Award for Research.