

Description

Coronavirus: 30% of Women Reduced Use of Maternal, Newborn Health Services

The impact of coronavirus on pregnant women and mothers with small babies in Uganda and Ethiopia has been revealed. **30% have declared they have reduced their use of maternal and newborn health services since the outbreak began.**

The insight comes from over 800 women surveyed, including mothers that have given birth in the last 12 months. These interviews, commissioned as part of Women and Children First's work, were conducted between September and December 2020.

Services women were less likely to attend include antenatal clinics and postnatal care. These include vaccinations for their babies, immunising them from diseases like measles and pneumonia.

The news comes after the Global Financing Facility for Women, Children and Adolescents announced there has been a 25% drop in coverage of essential health interventions in the poorest countries.

Mikey Rosato, Chief Executive at Women and Children First says, "**Coronavirus is killing women and their babies, not through infections, but its catastrophic impact on health services."**

Attention and resources were moved to Covid-19 preparation and response.

Mikey Rosato explains, "**Women are scared to access health services.** The first lockdowns were very strict. There was fear about leaving the house and confusion as to what was allowed.

"Weak health services, perception of their low quality and now coronavirus has had a massive impact on trust. **Women are not getting the critical support they need, when they need it**."

Women and Children First has been working to provide training, guidance and PPE to community health workers and services in Oyam, Uganda, enabling facilities to stay open. The charity also supported health workers spreading information through megaphones and a radio talk show.

Joanna Drazdzewska, Head of Programmes, adds, "**Strengthening and supporting community health workers, as Women and Children First do, is also important.** When people build rapport and trust their local health workers that is highly valuable.

"**Now more work is urgently needed.** There is a perception among some that women who will go to health facilities are putting themselves at life-threatening risk. These false rumours and stories can spread like wildfire.

"**It is vitally important to strengthen the relationships between communities and health care services. This is where women's health groups can support**, checking with health workers and health authorities for information and guidance.

"**Potentially groups can help encourage people to visit services, creating discussions and enabling women to share information and knowledge, encouraging people to go back.**

"These groups, which meet outside while adhering to social distancing rules, advocate for better health services. They inspire communities to create a productive dialogue with community health workers, enabling more women and their children to survive and thrive.

"**Mobilising communities in this way, at this time will save lives**."

Women and Children First is continuing to work with expecting mothers in some of the world's poorest communities throughout the coronavirus pandemic. Women's health groups are creating inspirational impacts and encouraging mothers to get the support they need. To find out more visit www.womenandchildrenfirst.org.uk

Women and Children First is an international development charity, established in 2001, that supports women, children and young people in some of the world's poorest communities in Africa and Asia, including Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

The charity believes too many women die needlessly and do not have control over their futures, facing problems that harm them, kill them or hold them back. These include preventable and treatable problems like complications in pregnancy and childbirth, violence and diseases like malaria.

The organisation believes that local communities are best placed to find the answers to these problems and can come up with the life-saving ideas to benefit their communities.

The charity is also adapting our approach to ensure the safety and good health of the people we are supporting during the coronavirus. This includes making temporary facemasks, to reduce the risk of the disease spreading, giving information through door-to-door visits and using radio broadcasts to provide health and hygiene advice.

People can get further updates from the charity by signing up to the newsletter at www.womenandchildrenfirst.org.uk/email-stories

They can make a donation to support the charity's work helping women and children to survive and thrive at www.womenandchildrenfirst.org.uk/donate

Organisations can contact the Women and Children First team about partnering with us to set up more women's health groups worldwide at www.womenandchildrenfirst.org.uk/about-us/contact-us

Mikey Rosato is the Chief Executive of Women and Children First. His expertise is in empowering local communities to find solutions that help prevent mothers and babies dying from preventable conditions. He has a PhD in Global Health.

Joanna Drazdzewska has significant experience in implementing reproductive health programmes in developing countries. Her focus is on increasing demand for health services, reducing gender inequality, and advocating for accessible quality care.

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