The challenges women with disabilities face in accessing reproductive health services in public health facilities in Nairobi

Whilst the importance of reproductive health has been acknowledged in international agreements, many countries do not consider sexual health as a legitimate health issue. Women with disabilities face major challenges in realizing their Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) due to the challenges they face in hospitals. The research aimed to explore the challenges that women with disabilities face while accessing SRH services in public hospitals in Nairobi. The study specifically assessed public health institutions where women with disabilities access SRH services. The social model of disability was used in order to better understand the challenges that women with disabilities face while accessing SRH services in public health facilities. A qualitative approach was applied in carrying out the research. An in-depth literature review on understanding disability and sexual and reproductive health was done. Over a period of two months, in-depth interviews and informal discussions were carried out to collect data from women with disabilities who have accessed SRH in public health facilities in Nairobi. The research findings reveal that women with disabilities seek various services related to their SRH in public hospitals including Kenyatta National Hospital—the largest referral hospital in Eastern Africa- and Pumwani Maternity Hospital (PMH) the largest hospital that specifically deals with SRH. The services sought included family planning, voluntary counselling and testing, maternity related services and also treatments related to their impairments. The findings further revealed that despite the hospital potential to offer gender sensitive SRH services, women with disabilities face a myriad of challenges in accessing the services. These include difficulties in access to the facilities, negative attitude of medical personnel towards SRH of women with disabilities and lack of measures to make the services friendly to women with various forms of disabilities. As a result, disabled women have not fully benefited from the SRH services offered in the health facilities. Rather than empowering them, to enjoy their SRH and rights, the prevailing situation has served to not only marginalise them but also deny them access to these services. The study suggests that in order for women with disabilities to enjoy their rights, there is need for certain measures to be put in place. They include awareness on SRH and disability, improving physical access to medical facilities, staff development among medical personnel, and adapting materials to fit persons with disabilities.

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