

From Silent Tears to Restored Dignity: Success Stories and Aftermath Smiles of Women and Girls following Obstetric Fistula Repairs in Ghana

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Open Discussion ePoster
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(ePoster Station 3)
Exhibition HallRestored
Dignity
Brighter
Tomorrows

BACKGROUND

- Obstetric fistula remains a significant yet preventable maternal health challenge in low-resource settings, including Ghana.
- Women and girls often experience physical suffering, stigma, social exclusion and loss of dignity (WHO, 2024).
- Less is known about their recovery journeys, life after surgical repair and meaningful reintegration into society.

AIM

- To explore the recovery journeys, reintegration experiences and lived aftermath of women and adolescent girls following obstetric fistula repair in Ghana.

METHODS

- Design:** Qualitative narrative inquiry guided by Appreciative Inquiry.
- Participants:** 11 participants (3 adolescents aged 15–19; 8 women aged 20–45) purposively and snowball sampled.
- Data collection:** In-depth interviews.
- Data analysis:** Braun and Clarke's (2022) thematic analysis.
- Rigour:** Guba and Lincoln (credibility, confirmability, conformability, transferability and authenticity).
- Ethical approval:** CREC reference number: 58549447_CRECHS_2024. Informed consent obtained. Helsinki (2025).



RESULTS: FOUR INTERCONNECTED THEMES

1. EARLY VULNERABILITY Suffering and social exclusion



"I was married at age 15. Labour lasted almost two days at home. My baby died and I started leaking. I stayed indoors because of shame, but today, I smile because I am healed and can walk freely again."

Asana, 48 years

"People avoided me because of the smell. I felt rejected and alone, but now I sit with others, laugh and feel accepted again."

Precious, 33 years

2. RESTORED IDENTITY Confidence and belonging



"Before, I hid from people because I was ashamed. Now I go to the market, laugh with friends, and feel proud of myself again."

Munia, 18 years

"My family accepts me now. I dress well, attend gatherings, and feel like a respected woman again."

Maggi, 33 years

3. NEW BEGINNINGS Empowerment and purpose



"I have started trading again. I can now provide for my children, and I am happy seeing my life improve."

Zeinab, 28 years

"I now speak to other women about treatment and encourage them. Helping others gives me joy, and my life has meaning again."

Ekuwa, 40 years

4. EMOTIONAL BURDEN AND PSYCHOLOGICAL RECOVERY



"I stayed indoors because of shame and cried often, thinking my life was over, but now I feel free and happy again."

Adiza, 17 years

"I used to fear meeting people, but now I wake up happy, without fear, and feel confident in myself again."

Yasmin, 32 years



CONCLUSION

- Obstetric fistula repair is a catalyst for profound transformation, restoring dignity and identity.
- Survivors move from silence and suffering to resilience and renewed life meaning.
- Holistic, survivor-centred care, including mental health services and community engagement, is essential for sustainable reintegration.



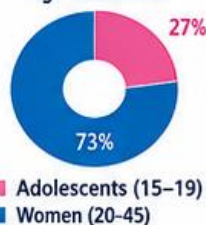
IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND POLICY

- Integrate mental health and psychosocial support into fistula care.
- Strengthen community engagement with survivors.
- Promote early access to quality maternal care to prevent fistula.
- Support survivor advocacy and income-generating opportunities.

PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS (n = 11)

8 Women
(20–45 years)3 Adolescents
(15–19 years)

Age distribution



JOURNEY FROM SUFFERING TO RESTORATION



Suffering and stigma



Surgical repair



Healing and recovery

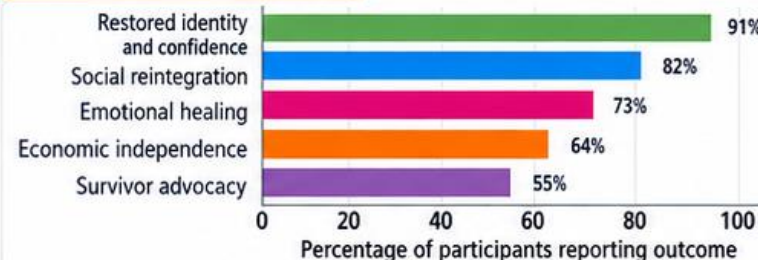


Reintegration and empowerment



Restored dignity and brighter futures

KEY OUTCOMES AFTER REPAIR



SELECTED REFERENCES

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). Thematic analysis: A practical guide. SAGE Publications.
- World Health Organization. (2024). Obstetric fistula: Key facts. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/obstetric-fistula>
- World Bank. (2025). World development report 2025: Health, equity, and development. World Bank Publications.