

# Health seeking behaviors of women living with obstetric fistula in Zimbabwe: A qualitative cross sectional study

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## Abstract

**Objective:** To explore and understand health-seeking behaviors of women affected by obstetric fistula in Zimbabwe and to determine reasons women stayed with their fistula. **Design:** A cross sectional qualitative study was conducted using in-depth interview guides. **Setting:** Chinhoyi Provincial Hospital, the main fistula repair center in Zimbabwe. **Study population:** Women who had come for fistula repair between November and December 2019 were the study population for this study. **Methods:** All women who had come for fistula repair during the study period, who consented to participate were purposively enrolled into the study. Those who did not consent were excluded. In-depth interviews were audio recorded and transcribed into written scripts and analyzed using NVIVO 10. **Main outcome measures:** Health seeking behaviors of fistula survivors and reasons for living with fistula. **Results:** Twenty-one of the 29 women who had come for the fistula camp, were enrolled. Mean period staying with fistula was 4.7 years (SD±12). Participants sought help from faith and spiritual healers first before medical help for fistula but all sought medical care at one time during or after delivery. Reasons cited for staying with fistula included lack of knowledge of availability of repair services, lack of resources and powerlessness in decision making. **Conclusions:** Barriers to access should be addressed so that women get the treatment they require. Since all participants accessed a health facility at one point, medical care could be offered for prevention and care of fistula **Funding:** Nil **Key words:** Obstetric fistula; Health seeking behavior; Zimbabwe

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