

Gender

Project to support pregnant, postpartum women starts

By Augustina Tawiah

A PROJECT aimed at providing mental health and psychosocial support for pregnant women and girls and postpartum mothers living with HIV, tuberculosis and sexual and reproductive health problems has begun in Accra.

The three-year project, which will benefit 7,800 pregnant women and girls and 6,200 postpartum mothers from 14 districts in seven regions of the country, will, among others, empower women and girls to make informed choices to protect their health and rights when completed.

It is being facilitated by BasicNeeds-Ghana with support from Expertise France.

Speaking at the project commencement in Accra last Wednesday, where stakeholders were

briefed about the project, the Executive Director of BasicNeeds-Ghana, Peter Yaro, explained that pregnant women and girls and postpartum mothers had been targeted for the project because pregnancy and child delivery were very critical stages in the lives of women and children that needed lots of medical attention.

Making these stages more challenging, he added, was living with HIV and AIDS or tuberculosis, which, according to him, tended to affect pregnant women and girls and postpartum mothers more than the rest of the population.

Mental health

He said from engagements with stakeholders, analysis and literature, it has been realised that mental health and psychosocial support services were inadequate in HIV and tuberculosis responses, which was also very evident in maternal and child health care and

welfare.

Quoting figures, he said almost 20 per cent of pregnant women and girls and postpartum mothers experience moderate to severe depression, adding

that, sexual and gender-based violence and intimate partner violence constituted barriers to impacting HIV, TB treatment and maternal and child health care.

On how they intended to help the targeted beneficiaries, Mr Yaro said they had put in place key activities including providing training, support and supervision of community health care workers to utilise screening tools to identify mental health and psychosocial care needs of pregnant women and girls and postpartum mothers, including those living with HIV and TB.

He said once that was done, they would create safe spaces for the delivery of mental health and psychosocial support services, including counselling to support the target beneficiaries.

"We think that doing this, in combination with others that will be undertaken, we can instil integrated mental health and psychosocial services for people, particularly women, pregnant women and newly-delivered mothers who have HIV or are at risk of it," he said.

Mr Yaro added that as part of the project, they intended to establish 28 self-help support groups to provide peer

and emotional support to pregnant women and girls and postpartum women with mental health challenges.

He explained that with peer support, pregnant women and girls and

postpartum mothers living with HIV and tuberculosis could enhance their self-confidence, speak about their experiences, be role models to others and be a source of encouragement and motivation to others who felt that they needed to hide

because of their situation and come out and access the kind of treatment that would help them live positive lives.

Depression, anxiety

A psychiatrist at the Mental Health Authority, Dr Susan Seffah, said about 10 to 20 per cent of the country's population suffer from depression and anxiety and pregnant women, girls and postpartum mothers who have those conditions, need much attention because they were already vulnerable.

She explained that pregnant women and girls and postpartum mothers living with HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis go through a lot of psychosocial stress during that period, adding that some become suicidal.

On how the public can help in such situations, she advised that if they knew any individual who had changed their behaviour in any way, it was a signal for them to do something about it.

Highlight

■ The three-year project, which will benefit 7,800 pregnant women and girls and 6,200 postpartum mothers from 14 districts in seven regions of the country, will, among others, empower women and girls to make informed choices to protect their health and rights when completed.



• Peter Yaro (middle), Executive Director, BasicNeeds Ghana; Dr Susan Seffah (left), Psychiatrist, Mental Health Authority, and Samuel Hackman (right), Executive Secretary, Country Coordinating Mechanism Ghana, in a discussion during the meeting. Picture: EDNA SALVO-KOTÉY