WOMEN’S HEALTH: OBSTETRIC FISTULA

Date: 2/11

OBJECTIVES: After working through this lesson, participants will be able to:
1. Describe an obstetric fistula.
2. Know the main cause of obstetric fistula.
3. Explain some problems caused by obstetric fistula.
4. List three ways to prevent obstetric fistula, and one way to treat them.
5. Identify female reproductive organs in a drawing.

OVERVIEW FOR TRAINERS: This is a lesson in the series on women’s health. Teach this lesson alongside the health stories, A walk to health and Terefa’s story. Read this lesson through before teaching it. Many people may not be familiar with the section on Female Anatomy. Teach this lesson with sensitivity to your culture. You may want to teach men and women separately.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>METHOD</th>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>KNOWLEDGE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Living in shame</td>
<td>30”</td>
<td>I. Living in shame</td>
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<tr>
<td>Divide into small groups to read and discuss the story, Living in shame. Return to the large group to discuss them further. Make a list of any terms that are new or unclear to you.</td>
<td></td>
<td>A. Describe the living conditions of these young women and girls.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Shame</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>2. Isolation</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>3. Abandoned by husbands</td>
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<td>4. Isolate from others</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>5. Poverty—unable to earn money</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6. Despair</td>
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<td>7. Blamed or shunned by others</td>
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<td>B. What is the cause of their shame and suffering?</td>
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<td>B. What is the cause of their shame and suffering?</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. They are living with an obstetric fistula.</td>
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<td>2. Their babies probably also died.</td>
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<td>C. What is an obstetric fistula? Explain these terms: vagina, bladder, rectum, obstetric, fistula</td>
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<td>C. What is an obstetric fistula?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1. An obstetric fistula is a hole between her vagina and her bladder or rectum.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Obstetric means occurring during childbirth, during the birth of the baby.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. A fistula is an opening or hole.</td>
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<td>4. The vagina is the birth canal.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>5. The bladder is where the urine or pee is stored.</td>
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<td>6. The rectum is the end of the intestines or gut where the feces or poop is stored.</td>
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<td>7. A hole between the bladder and the vagina causes urine or pee to leak out the vagina</td>
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<td>8. A hole between the vagina and the rectum causes feces or</td>
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This lesson is part of an extensive series for use in Community Health Evangelism (CHE) ministries. CHE facilitators skilled in participatory learning methods enable communities to escape cycles of poverty and live as followers of Jesus.
D. What causes obstetric fistula?

E. Why are these women embarrassed or ashamed?

F. What other problems can result from the obstetric fistula?

G. We will discuss prevention and treatment of obstetric fistula in a few minutes.

II. Cause of obstetric fistula

A. Divide into small groups, or work as a large group. What do the ovaries, Fallopian tubes, uterus and vagina do?

B. Find the bladder, uterus, vagina, rectum, and backbone.

C. What cause an obstetric fistula?
### Prevention and treatment

#### A. Major problem
1. Many women are involved.
2. More than 2 million women may have obstetric fistula.
3. They live in shame, isolation, and poverty, with medical problems.

#### B. Prevention
1. Delay marriage and childbirth.

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<td>passes through the vagina or birth canal.</td>
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<td>2. If there is a blockage, the labor may last for several days.</td>
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<td>3. The baby's head puts pressure on the walls of the vagina.</td>
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<td>4. That reduces the blood supply to the area.</td>
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<td>5. If childbirth is long and difficult, or blocked, the walls of the vagina become thin and damaged.</td>
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<td>6. Over time, the baby often dies.</td>
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<td>7. The damaged wall of the birth canal leaves a hole, or fistula, between the vagina and the bladder or rectum.</td>
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### Are there any other causes of obstetric fistula?

#### D. Other causes
1. Harmful traditional practices
2. Female genital mutilation or female circumcision
3. Harmful cutting of the vagina during childbirth
4. Rape or sexual abuse

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### Who is at risk for obstetric fistula?

#### E. Who is at risk?
1. Young women
2. Women with poverty and few resources
3. Early marriage and childbirth
4. Low education
5. Poor nutrition
6. Women with a small pelvis, so the baby's head cannot pass out. (Teenage mothers have small pelvises.)
7. Low status of women, so they do not get adequate care
8. Women who do not have access to good health care or prenatal care
9. No access to emergency C sections
10. Women living in Asia and in sub-Saharan Africa
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<td>2.</td>
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<td>This allows time for the girl's pelvis to grow.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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<td>Young women with a small pelvis often have difficult deliveries and obstetric fistula.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
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<td>Avoid traditional practices such as female genital mutilation and cutting of the vagina during the delivery.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
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<td>Get good prenatal care, or health care before the birth of the baby.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
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<td>Have access to emergency medical care, such as emergency C sections.</td>
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C. How can obstetric fistula be cured?

C. Treatment or cure
1. Most obstetric fistula can be cured with a relatively simple surgery.
2. The hole in the vagina and in the bladder or rectum is repaired.
3. This prevents the leakage of urine and feces (pee and poop).
4. The lives of the women improve dramatically after surgery.

References:


ATTITUDE: Obstetric fistula can be prevented and cured.

SKILL: Participants will be able to teach others about obstetric fistula.

EVALUATION: Are the participants teaching their neighbors about obstetric fistula?

MATERIALS: - Newsprint, markers, masking tape
- Living in shame story
- Facts on obstetric fistula handout

This lesson is used in: Health Promotion and in Women's cycle of life/Women's health
Living in Shame

Millions of girls and young women in resource-poor countries are living in shame and isolation, often abandoned by their husbands and excluded by their families and communities. They usually live in abject poverty, shunned or blamed by society and, unable to earn money, many fall deeper into poverty and further despair.

The reason for this suffering is that these young girls or women are living with an obstetric fistula due to complications which arose during childbirth. Their babies are also probably dead, which adds to their depression, pain and suffering.

An obstetric fistula is an abnormal opening or hole between a woman’s vagina and bladder and/or rectum, through which her urine and/or feces continually leak. Naturally these women are embarrassed that they are unable to control their bodily functions, that they are constantly soiled and wet, and that they smell. Their pain and shame may be further complicated by recurring infections, infertility, and damage to their vaginal tissue that makes sexual activity impossible and paralysis of the muscles in their lower legs which may require the use of crutches, if any are available.

The greater tragedy is that these obstetric fistulas can largely be avoided by delaying the age of first pregnancy, by stopping harmful traditional practices and by timely access to maternal and obstetric care. They can be repaired by simple surgery.


**Discussion questions:**
Discuss these questions in your small group. Return to the large group to discuss them further. Make a list of any terms that are new or unclear to you.

1. Describe the living conditions of these young women and girls.
2. What is the cause of their shame and suffering?
3. What is an obstetric fistula?
4. Explain these terms: vagina, bladder, rectum, obstetric, fistula
5. What causes obstetric fistula?
6. Why are these women embarrassed or ashamed?
7. What other problems can result from the obstetric fistula?
8. Can obstetric fistula be prevented? How?
9. How can obstetric fistula be treated?

**Practice**
Practice telling each other the story of *Living in shame.*
Female Anatomy

This is a cross-section, looking at a woman's internal organs from the side.

Find the:
1. Bladder (where the urine or pee is stored)
2. Uterus or womb
3. Vagina or birth canal
4. Rectum (the lower end of the intestines or bowel). The rectum contains feces or poop.
5. Backbone

Source of illustrations: Wikimedia, 2011
Facts on Obstetric Fistula

Each year between 50,000 to 100,000 women worldwide are affected by obstetric fistula, a hole in the birth canal. The development of obstetric fistula is directly linked to obstructed labor.

Women who experience obstetric fistula suffer constant incontinence, shame, social segregation and health problems. It is estimated that more than 2 million young women live with untreated obstetric fistula in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

Obstetric fistula is preventable; it can largely be avoided by:

- delaying the age of first pregnancy;
- stopping harmful traditional practices; and
- timely access to obstetric care.

Most fistula occur among women living in poverty in cultures where a woman’s status and self-esteem may depend almost entirely on her marriage and ability to bear children.

Patients with uncomplicated fistulae can undergo a simple surgery to repair the hole in their bladder or rectum.

Preventing and managing obstetric fistula will contribute to improved health of mothers.