

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Traditional Birth Attendants in Rural Gambia: Beyond Health to Social Cohesion

Stella Nyanzi^{1*}, Hawah Manneh² and Gijs Walraven³

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Keppel St., London WC1E 7HT¹; Medical Research Council Laboratories, The Gambia²; Secretariat de Son Altesse l'Aga Khan, Aiglemont 60270, Gouvieux, France³

*For Correspondence: E-mail: snyanzi@yahoo.com

Abstract

Studies of traditional birth attendants over-emphasise the health dimension. Based on ethnographic fieldwork (utilising participant observation, individual interviews, group discussions, participatory rapid appraisal, and literature review) in The Gambia, this paper discusses the multiplicity of the role(s) of TBAs in their communities. As general healthcare providers, 'mothers of the village', gurus of religious and socio-cultural rites, repositories of society's secrets, economic survivors, village leaders and elders, TBAs contribute to the 'gum that holds society together'. They actively engage in the political, economic, cultural, religious, gender, health and wellbeing of their societies. TBAs are important for social cohesion and welfare; not mere health practitioners. Reflections about TBAs open a window into understanding the wider rural Gambian society.

Keywords: *Traditional birth attendants, reproductive health, Africa*

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