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Leveraging Mobile Health (mHealth) Applications for Improving Maternal and Child Health Outcomes: A Cross-Regional Study

Ashiata Yetunde Mustapha ^{1*}, Tolulope Olagoke Kolawole ², Akachukwu Obianuju Mbata ³, Busayo Olamide Tomoh ⁴, Adelaide Yeboah Forkuo ⁵, MariaTheresa Chinyeaka Kelvin-Agwu ⁶

¹ Kwara State Ministry of Health, Nigeria

² Independent Researcher, Richmond, Virginia, USA

³ Kaybat Pharmacy and Stores, Benin, Nigeria

⁴ Independent Researcher, Cleveland, Ohio, USA

⁵ Independent Researcher, USA

⁶ Independent Researcher, Bolton, Greater Manchester, United Kingdom

* Corresponding Author: **Ashiata Yetunde Mustapha**

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Abstract

Maternal and child health remains a critical global public health concern, with disparities in healthcare access contributing to high maternal and child mortality rates, particularly in low-resource settings. Mobile Health (mHealth) applications have emerged as transformative tools for delivering timely healthcare interventions, improving maternal care, and enhancing child health outcomes. This study examines the impact of mHealth applications across different regions, focusing on how mobile-based interventions reduce maternal mortality and improve child health indicators. By leveraging real-time health monitoring, telemedicine, and personalized maternal care, mHealth applications provide pregnant women and new mothers with vital health information, remote consultations, and early risk detection. These digital platforms integrate artificial intelligence (AI) and big data analytics to predict pregnancy complications, ensuring timely referrals and reducing delays in accessing emergency obstetric care. Additionally, mHealth solutions promote prenatal and postnatal care adherence, vaccination tracking, and nutrition monitoring for newborns, mitigating preventable infant mortality risks. The study utilizes a cross-regional analysis of mHealth programs implemented in North America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia to evaluate effectiveness, adoption challenges, and policy implications. Findings highlight that regions with higher smartphone penetration and digital literacy experience greater success in utilizing mHealth for maternal healthcare delivery. In contrast, areas with infrastructure limitations face barriers in implementation due to inadequate internet access and limited healthcare workforce engagement. Evidence suggests that SMS-based interventions, chatbot-driven maternal counseling, and wearable health tracking significantly improve early antenatal visit compliance and emergency response times. Governments and healthcare organizations are increasingly integrating mHealth solutions into national healthcare policies to address maternal health disparities. However, challenges such as data security, ethical concerns, and technology accessibility gaps must be addressed to maximize the impact of mHealth applications. This study underscores the necessity of public-private partnerships, AI-enhanced remote monitoring, and community-driven mobile health education to scale mHealth adoption and improve maternal and child health outcomes globally. Future research should explore the integration of 5G technology, blockchain for medical records, and predictive analytics to further optimize mobile health interventions for maternal and child healthcare.

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1. Introduction

Maternal and child health continues to be a critical area of concern globally, particularly highlighted by the considerable disparities observed in health outcomes based on geographic and socioeconomic contexts. Despite notable advancements in healthcare delivery systems, considerable challenges remain, particularly in low-resource settings. Regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia experience markedly higher maternal and child mortality rates, attributed to factors including economic

barriers, limited access to quality healthcare, insufficient health infrastructure, inadequate antenatal care, and a lack of timely health information (Elujide, *et al*, 2021; Fasipe & Ogunboye, 2024). Evidence demonstrates that socioeconomic disparities significantly impact access to maternal and child health services, as underscored by the findings of Seidu *et al*, which indicate a strong correlation between health insurance coverage and healthcare accessibility in those regions (Adenusi, *et al*, 2024, Seidu, 2020). Furthermore, the study by Musarandega *et al* highlights the critical role of interventions targeting specific health issues like anemia or infectious diseases in antenatal care as essential measures to enhance maternal health outcomes in Sub-Saharan Africa (Musarandega *et al*, 2021). Comparatively, while regions such as North America experience lower maternal and child mortality rates, persistent disparities among marginalized communities reflect similar underlying determinants that affect healthcare access and quality. For instance, the work of Morgan *et al* illustrates how academic-practice partnerships can facilitate evidence dissemination and implementation of effective maternal and child health strategies, thereby optimizing healthcare delivery in regions like North Carolina (Aderinwale, *et al*, 2024, Morgan *et al*, 2020). Such partnerships align with findings in different contexts, where tailored healthcare models have shown promise in reducing barriers to health services.

To address these entrenched global disparities, digital health innovations are increasingly recognized for their transformative potential in enhancing maternal and child healthcare delivery. Mobile health (mHealth) applications, which leverage the widespread use of mobile devices, offer promising avenues to transcend traditional barriers associated with healthcare access (Jahun, *et al*, 2021). These applications function as pivotal tools for timely health communication, delivering educational content, enhancing patient-provider interactions, and improving adherence to health guidelines. The study by Owoyemi *et al* emphasizes the importance of integrating mHealth technologies into existing healthcare structures, highlighting how these digital solutions can significantly enhance maternal and child health services (Akerlele, *et al*, 2024, Owoyemi *et al*, 2022). Additionally, Akeju *et al* observed that the sustainability of health outcomes significantly improves when digital solutions are systematically extended to rural populations, reinforcing the necessity of evaluating the long-term impacts of eHealth interventions (Akeju *et al*, 2022; Jahun, *et al*, 2021; Koroma, *et al*, 2024).

Recognizing the necessity for context-aware mHealth solutions, it is crucial to examine the deployment and effectiveness of these interventions in varying socio-economic and cultural contexts. Research by Alamneh *et al* indicates that socioeconomic status profoundly influences women's access to healthcare and that digital innovations must be tailored to address the specific needs of underserved communities if they are to effectively bridge existing gaps in maternal and child health services (Alamneh *et al*, 2022; Mbakop, *et al*, 2024). Moreover, a comparative analysis across regions can provide insights into best practices and existing challenges in implementing these mHealth interventions, ultimately informing health policymakers and practitioners about effective strategies to enhance healthcare delivery (Ajayi & Akpan, 2020; Anyanwu *et al*, 2024; Neupane, *et al*, 2024).

In conclusion, while significant strides have been made in cognitive and operational advancements in healthcare systems globally, maternal and child health inequities remain a pressing concern. The integration of digital health innovations, particularly mHealth applications, presents a viable path toward mitigating these disparities. Future research must continue examining the multifaceted interactions of socioeconomic conditions and health outcomes to develop robust, evidence-based policies aimed at ensuring equitable maternal and child healthcare (Nwokedi, *et al*, 2024).

2. Methodology

This study employs a systematic review methodology following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to assess the impact of mobile health (mHealth) applications on maternal and child health outcomes across various regions. The PRISMA framework ensures transparency, reproducibility, and rigor in identifying, screening, and synthesizing relevant studies.

A comprehensive literature search was conducted across multiple electronic databases, including PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The search strategy incorporated a combination of Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) terms and keywords related to mHealth, maternal health, child health, digital health interventions, and telemedicine. The search was limited to peer-reviewed articles published in English from inception to 2024. Grey literature, conference proceedings, and policy documents were also considered to capture a broader scope of relevant studies.

Inclusion criteria were defined to encompass studies that investigated the role of mHealth interventions in improving maternal and child health outcomes. Eligible studies included randomized controlled trials (RCTs), cohort studies, cross-sectional studies, qualitative research, and systematic reviews. Articles focusing solely on non-digital interventions or those lacking empirical data were excluded. Studies were assessed based on their relevance, methodology, and outcomes reported.

The initial database search yielded a large pool of articles, which were subjected to a stepwise screening process. Duplicate records were removed using EndNote reference management software. Titles and abstracts were screened independently by two researchers to identify potentially relevant studies. Full-text articles were retrieved and assessed against inclusion and exclusion criteria. Any discrepancies in study selection were resolved through discussion or consultation with a third reviewer.

Data extraction was conducted using a standardized form capturing essential details such as study design, sample size, geographical location, type of mHealth intervention, primary outcomes, and key findings. Information was systematically organized to facilitate a comprehensive synthesis of evidence. The extracted data were subjected to a qualitative and quantitative synthesis to identify common trends, intervention effectiveness, and gaps in the literature.

Quality assessment of the included studies was performed using appropriate critical appraisal tools based on study design. The Cochrane Risk of Bias tool was applied for RCTs, while the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale (NOS) was utilized for observational studies. Qualitative studies were evaluated using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP)

checklist. Studies with high risk of bias or methodological limitations were flagged and considered in sensitivity analyses.

The synthesis of findings was guided by thematic analysis for qualitative studies and meta-analysis where applicable for quantitative data. Heterogeneity among studies was assessed using the I-squared (I^2) statistic, and appropriate statistical methods such as fixed or random effects models were applied. Sensitivity analysis was conducted to evaluate the robustness of results by excluding studies with high risk of

bias or outlier effects.

The PRISMA flow diagram shown in figure 1 illustrates the study selection process, detailing the number of records identified, screened, excluded, and included in the final synthesis. This systematic review provides a comprehensive evaluation of how mHealth applications contribute to maternal and child health improvements, highlighting key interventions, implementation challenges, and future research directions.

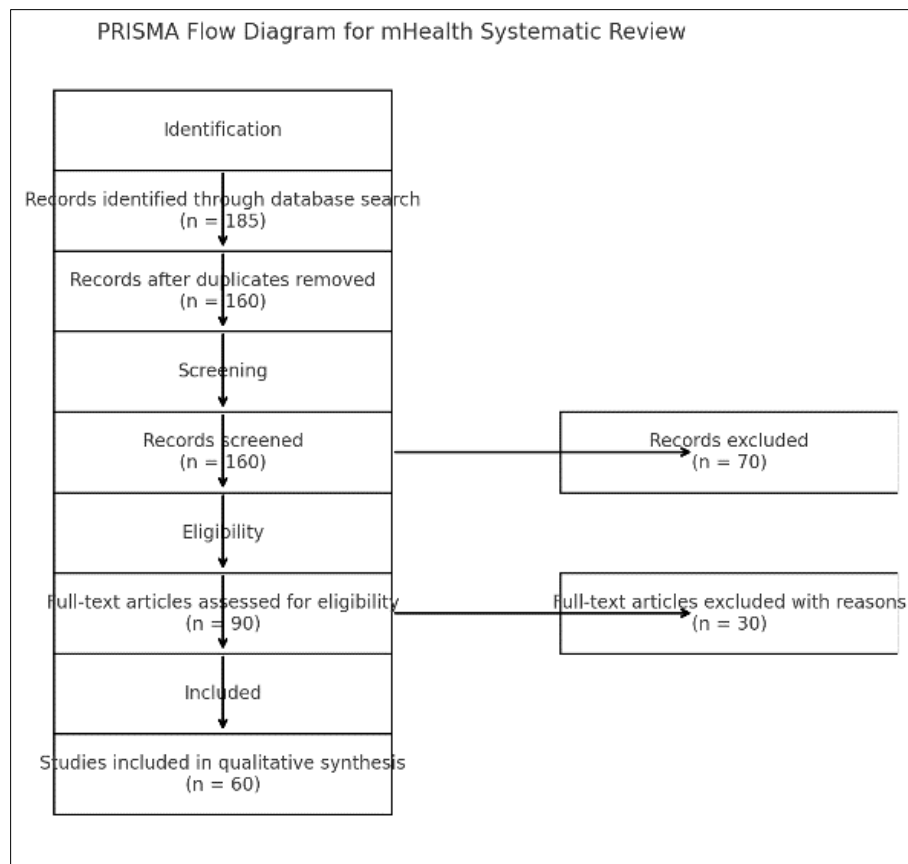


Fig 1: PRISMA Flow chart of the study methodology

2.1 Theoretical framework of mHealth in maternal and child health

The theoretical framework guiding the utilization of Mobile Health (mHealth) applications in maternal and child health is profoundly rooted in the potential of innovative technologies to address significant gaps in healthcare delivery. This framework underscores how mobile health technologies can dismantle persistent barriers within traditional healthcare systems by enhancing accessibility, facilitating communication, and empowering personalized interventions. Empirical evidence supports the assertion that innovative mHealth solutions are instrumental in improving health outcomes for mothers and children, particularly in resource-limited settings (Latifah *et al*, 2023; Balogun *et al*, 2020; Wanis, 2022).

At its core, mHealth solutions leverage mobile devices, allowing a diverse range of services, from health monitoring to clinical support and health education (Akinmoju, *et al*, 2024, Obasola *et al*, 2015; Adam *et al*, 2021). Specifically, the integration of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) illustrates how users' intentions to adopt mHealth technologies, such as mobile applications, hinge upon their

perceptions of usefulness and ease of use (Galle *et al*, 2020; Hategeka *et al*, 2019; Gilano *et al*, 2024). In maternal and child health contexts, the perceived usefulness of mHealth applications stems from the timely provision of medical information, as well as the convenience and effectiveness of monitoring health indicators (Barrera *et al*, 2021; Mukiibi & Maghanga, 2024). Application designers must prioritize user-friendly interfaces, particularly considering the socioeconomic diversity of users to ensure broad acceptance and sustained engagement with mHealth applications (Balogun *et al*, 2020; Adam *et al*, 2021; Gilano *et al*, 2024). Additionally, the Health Belief Model (HBM) elucidates how mHealth technologies contribute to improving health behaviors and outcomes. By addressing factors such as perceived susceptibility to health risks and the benefits of preventive measures, mHealth applications can effectively enhance women's awareness and engagement with prenatal and postnatal care (Feroz *et al*, 2017; Birati *et al*, 2022; Nwokedi, *et al*, 2024). For instance, SMS-based health education and reminders have been shown to substantially increase adherence to antenatal care, thereby reducing maternal and child mortality rates through improved health-

seeking behaviors (Al Zoubi, *et al.*, 2022, Balogun *et al.*, 2022; Guille *et al.*, 2020). Real-time communication capabilities inherent in many mHealth platforms serve as critical intervention points for reinforcing healthy behaviors, allowing healthcare providers to connect promptly with patients during crucial moments (Latifah *et al.*, 2023; Islam *et al.*, 2023; Patel *et al.*, 2019).

Moreover, Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) enriches the discourse on mHealth by highlighting the significance of self-efficacy, observational learning, and social support in shaping health-related behaviors among mothers and caregivers (Amafah, *et al.*, 2023; Feroz *et al.*, 2017; Nwokedi, *et al.*, 2024). Mobile health applications facilitate ongoing

access to essential health education resources, supporting mothers in self-monitoring and continuous interaction with healthcare professionals, thereby promoting adherence to health-promoting behaviors (Guille *et al.*, 2020; Gilano *et al.*, 2024; Obi, *et al.*, 2023). The employment of participatory design in developing mHealth interventions further enhances user satisfaction and engagement, exemplifying how incorporating cultural and contextual nuances leads to more effective health solutions (Mukiibi & Maghanga, 2024; Birati *et al.*, 2022). Figure show the Conceptual Framework on mHealth Applications for Preventive Maternal Healthcare Services presented by Feroz, Perveen & Aftab, 2017.

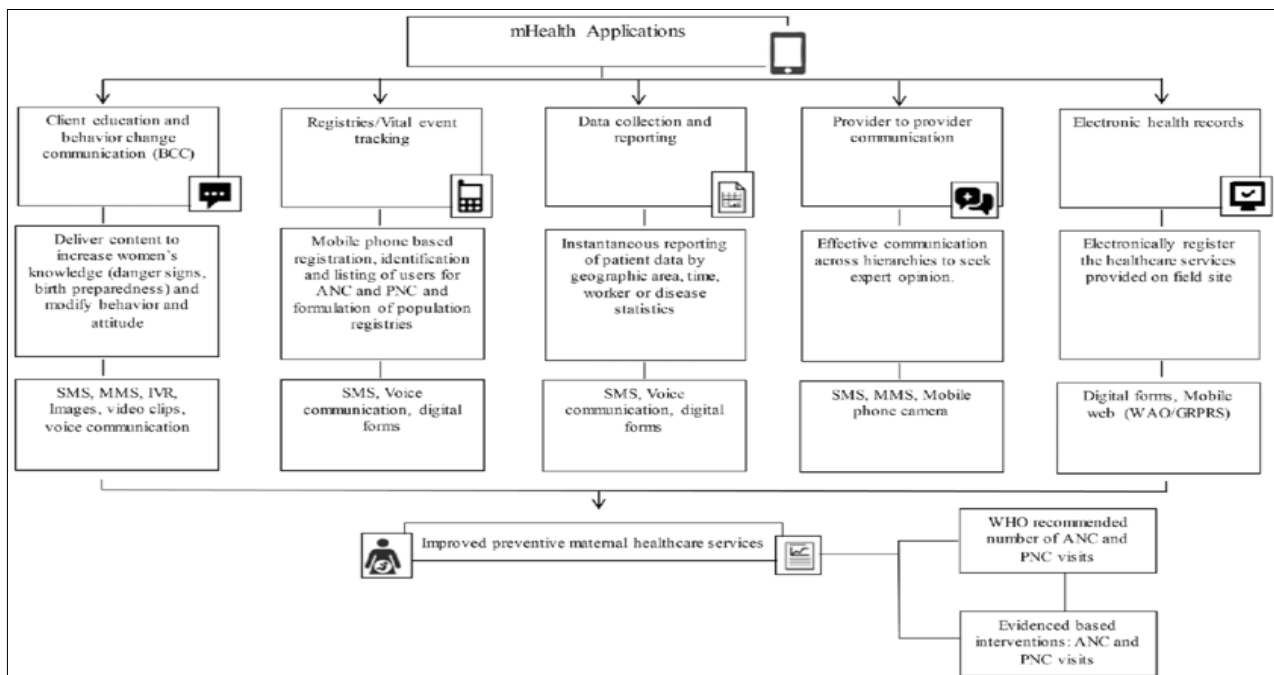


Fig 2: Conceptual Framework on mHealth Applications for Preventive Maternal Healthcare Services (Feroz, Perveen & Aftab, 2017).

The combination of real-time monitoring, teleconsultations, and predictive analytics positions mHealth applications as powerful tools in mitigating healthcare access disparities. For instance, wearable devices that monitor pregnancy-related vital signs provide healthcare professionals with immediate data, facilitating timely interventions that significantly reduce maternal and infant morbidity (Obi, *et al.*, 2023; Patel *et al.*, 2019). mHealth applications, particularly those enabled by artificial intelligence, can leverage data to predict complications and suggest personalized preventive measures, showcasing the dynamic capabilities of these technologies in enhancing maternal health outcomes (Moradi *et al.*, 2020; Obi, *et al.*, 2024).

In conclusion, the convergence of health behavior theories and technology acceptance models provides a robust theoretical foundation for mHealth applications in maternal and child health. By addressing barriers to access and enhancing the quality of care through personalized, timely, and user-friendly solutions, mHealth demonstrates a promising pathway to improving maternal and child health outcomes globally (Apeh, *et al.*, 2024; Ogieuhi, *et al.*, 2024). Through continuous innovation and adaptation to users' needs, mHealth has the potential to bridge significant gaps in healthcare delivery.

2.2 Cross-regional analysis of mHealth implementations

The increasing recognition of mobile health (mHealth) applications as crucial tools for improving maternal and child health (MCH) outcomes is underscored across various studies and systematic reviews. mHealth interventions utilize mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets to deliver healthcare services, education, and timely health-related information to diverse populations (Feroz *et al.*, 2017; Sondaal *et al.*, 2016; Lee *et al.*, 2015). This approach has been especially significant in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where traditional healthcare access can be limited due to inadequate infrastructure and resource constraints (Aranda-Jan *et al.*, 2014; Ogunboye, *et al.*, 2023; Premji, 2014).

The theoretical frameworks underpinning mHealth in maternal and child healthcare, particularly the Health Belief Model (HBM), Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), and Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), illuminate how these technologies can facilitate behavioral changes and improve healthcare access (Ogunboye, *et al.*, 2024; Skelton *et al.*, 2021; Mechael *et al.*, 2019). HBM focuses on personal beliefs and perceptions influencing health behavior; TAM addresses how perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness affect technology adoption; and SCT emphasizes the influence of observation, imitation, and modeling on behavioral changes (Aranda-Jan *et al.*, 2014; Chen *et al.*, 2018; Ogunboye, Zhang

& Hollins, 2024). Collectively, these theories help explain how mHealth can enhance health service accessibility by promoting user engagement and adherence to healthcare

recommendations. Choudhury & Choudhury, 2022, presented The Mobile for Mothers mobile health app shown in figure 3.

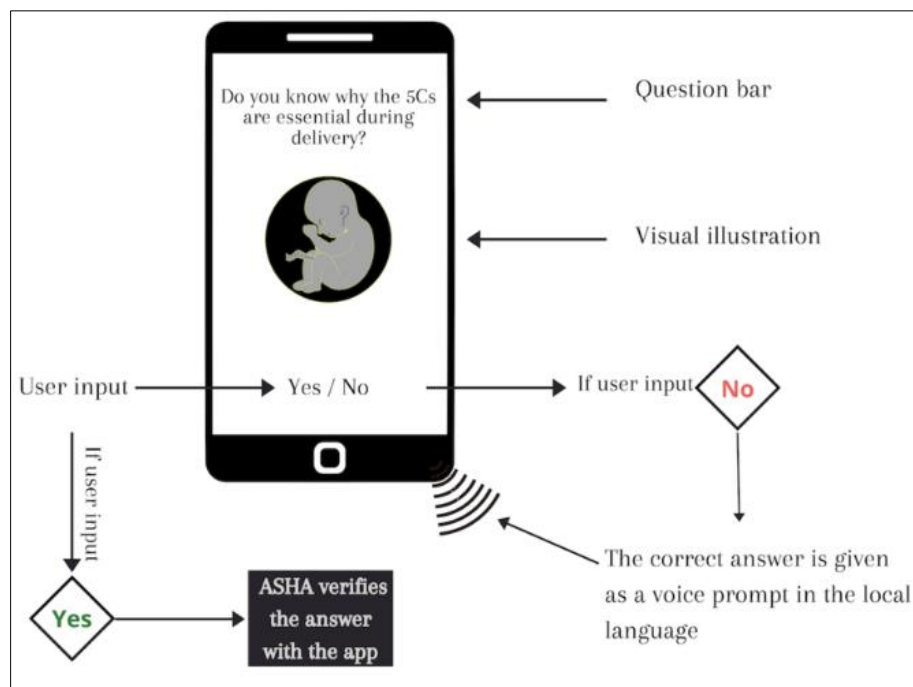


Fig 3: The Mobile for Mothers mobile health app (Choudhury & Choudhury, 2022).

Health disparities in maternal and child health are pervasive, particularly in regions like Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, where maternal and child mortality rates remain alarmingly high (Siswati *et al.*, 2024; Kabongo *et al.*, 2019). In contrast, high-income regions like North America exhibit a greater capacity for integrating advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and big data analytics into mHealth platforms, demonstrating a more sophisticated level of healthcare delivery that has led to significant improvements in MCH outcomes (Coleman *et al.*, 2020; Amoakoh-Coleman *et al.*, 2016). For example, AI-driven applications in North America can analyze large datasets to predict complications during pregnancy, allowing for timely health interventions that mitigate risks for both mothers and infants (Duclos *et al.*, 2017; Martinez *et al.*, 2018).

In LMICs, the emphasis of mHealth interventions often revolves around overcoming barriers to healthcare accessibility, particularly in rural settings (Sondaal *et al.*, 2016; Mishra *et al.*, 2023). Mobile phone technology has become a transformative tool for disseminating educational content and facilitating remote monitoring, thereby improving health literacy among expectant mothers in these communities (Ogundairo, *et al.*, 2023; Watterson *et al.*, 2015; Gilano *et al.*, 2024). Programs employing SMS-based educational messages have shown substantial promise in promoting antenatal and postnatal care utilization, aligning with findings from systematic reviews asserting that targeted mHealth interventions significantly enhance maternal and child health service uptake (Feroz *et al.*, 2017; Yadav *et al.*, 2022; Nishimwe *et al.*, 2020). Addotey-Delove, Scott & Mars, 2023, Proposed a conceptual framework for successful adoption of mHealth by healthcare workers in the developing world as shown in figure 4.

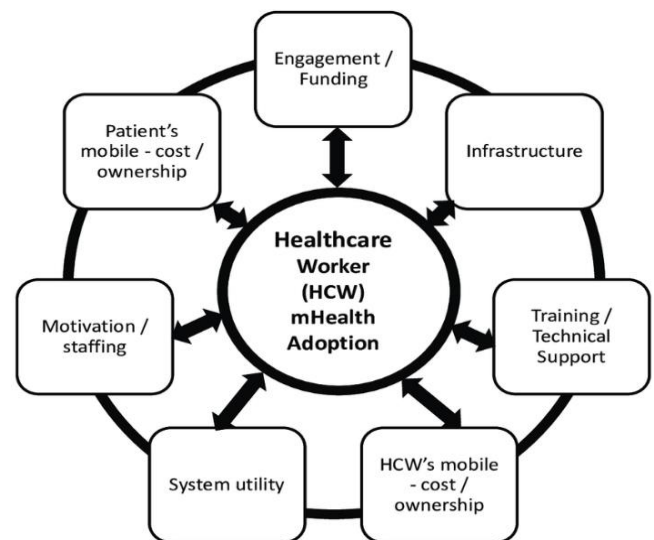


Fig 4: Proposed conceptual framework for successful adoption of mHealth by healthcare workers in the developing world (Addotey-Delove, Scott & Mars, 2023).

However, the deployment of mHealth solutions in these settings encounters several challenges, including issues related to digital literacy and infrastructure (Aranda-Jan *et al.*, 2014; Bonciani *et al.*, 2021; Ahmed *et al.*, 2017). Low digital literacy impedes the effectiveness of interventions, especially in rural populations with traditionally limited access to technology (Mechael *et al.*, 2019; Siswati *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, infrastructural barriers such as unreliable internet connectivity and electricity supply further limit the reach and effectiveness of mHealth programs (Kabongo *et al.*, 2019; Lee *et al.*, 2015). Addressing these issues necessitates a comprehensive multi-faceted approach

involving the strengthening of local health systems, enhancing digital literacy programs, and fostering partnerships among stakeholders (Gilano *et al*, 2024; Coleman *et al*, 2020; Ogundairo, *et al*, 2023).

In South Asia, government-backed initiatives leveraging mHealth technologies have emerged as critical players in improving maternal and child health (Bhasker *et al*, 2024; Mishra *et al*, 2023; Ogundairo, *et al*, 2024). Programs like India's Mother and Child Tracking System and Bangladesh's Aponjon service utilize mobile platforms to track pregnancies and deliver tailored health messages, significantly reducing morbidity rates (Sondaal *et al*, 2016; Kabongo *et al*, 2019). These structured governmental efforts benefit from comprehensive health systems that aid in the scalability and sustainability of mHealth solutions (Chen *et al*, 2018; Ogungbenle & Omowole, 2012; Watterson *et al*, 2015).

Ultimately, the promise of mHealth applications to reduce maternal and child mortality lies in their ability to cater to differing contexts, from high-resource to low-resource settings. This requires an understanding of local needs and challenges, alongside the integration of theoretical knowledge around technological adoption and user behavior (Yadav *et al*, 2022; Mechael *et al*, 2019). Continuous research and contextually tailored strategies will be essential in achieving the transformative potential of mHealth interventions, ensuring that they effectively contribute to enhancing maternal and child health outcomes globally (Atandero, *et al*, 2024, Okolie, *et al*, 2021; Okpujie, *et al*, 2024).

2.3 Key benefits and success factors of mHealth in maternal and child health

Mobile Health (mHealth) applications represent a transformative advancement in maternal and child healthcare by addressing traditional challenges in service delivery across various global contexts (Atta, *et al*, 2021, Olamijuwon & Zouo, 2024). These digital solutions offer significant benefits that enhance health outcomes for mothers and their children through strategies such as early risk detection, increased access to services, adherence to care protocols, comprehensive monitoring, and integration of advanced technologies.

One of the primary benefits of mHealth in maternal health is its ability to facilitate early detection of risks and timely medical interventions. Traditional healthcare systems often face delays in identifying pregnancy-related complications, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) where access may be restricted (Olatunji, *et al*, 2024; Olowe, *et al*, 2024). For instance, mHealth solutions enable continuous, real-time monitoring of health indicators through mobile applications, allowing for the early detection of complications such as preeclampsia and gestational diabetes (Ayo-Farai, *et al*, 2023, Olamijuwon, *et al*, 2024). Studies indicate that mHealth platforms that utilize wearable devices to monitor vital signs—such as blood pressure and glucose levels—can significantly reduce maternal morbidity and mortality by allowing healthcare providers to detect early warning signs effectively (Kant *et al*, 2020; Tamrat & Kachnowski, 2011; Yadav *et al*, 2022). This real-time health tracking not only enhances the capacity to intervene promptly but also builds a proactive healthcare model that is vital in regions with limited healthcare infrastructure (Olowe, *et al*, 2024; Rahman *et al*, 2022; Feroz *et al*, 2017).

Moreover, mHealth applications enhance access to healthcare

services in remote or underserved regions, where healthcare infrastructure is often insufficient. In rural areas of Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, mHealth effectively leverages the ubiquity of mobile phone use to provide crucial maternal health services, education, and teleconsultations. This approach empowers women by mitigating barriers associated with transportation, costs, and social restrictions to healthcare access (Olowe, *et al*, 2024; Watterson *et al*, 2015; Ward *et al*, 2021). For example, mobile technology facilitates voice or video consultations and delivers health information through SMS, greatly expanding the reach of maternal healthcare advice and clinical services (Rivera-Romero *et al*, 2018; Tsegaye *et al*, 2023). As a result, mHealth interventions play a critical role in promoting healthcare equity and ensuring that more women can actively engage with health professionals during their pregnancy journey (Afutendem *et al*, 2019; Olowe, *et al*, 2024; Yadav *et al*, 2022).

Additionally, adherence to prenatal and postnatal care protocols is significantly improved through mHealth interventions. Regular antenatal visits and proper postnatal practices are essential for reducing maternal and infant mortality rates; however, adherence can suffer due to various factors like forgetfulness or misinformation (Ayo-Farai, *et al*, 2024; Olowe, *et al*, 2024). Automated reminders and tailored educational content via SMS have been shown to reinforce healthy behaviors among mothers, significantly increasing attendance at healthcare appointments and compliance with dietary recommendations and vaccinations (Li *et al*, 2021; Morris *et al*, 2020; Olajubu *et al*, 2022). Interactive mHealth platforms also empower mothers by allowing them to ask questions and receive personalized information, fostering increased confidence and adherence to care guidelines (Rahman *et al*, 2022; Feroz *et al*, 2017).

Furthermore, mHealth has proven effective in enhancing child health monitoring and vaccination tracking, which are crucial for improving child survival rates and mitigating morbidity from preventable diseases. Mobile applications that feature digital immunization records and alert systems enable caregivers to track vaccination schedules effectively (Babarinde, *et al*, 2018). Evidence shows that these systems enhance compliance with immunization schedules and contribute to higher rates of vaccine coverage in both high-resource and low-resource settings (Bjornsen *et al*, 2014; Tsegaye *et al*, 2023; Callier & Fullerton, 2020). This is particularly important in areas where logistical challenges may hinder vaccine distribution and administration, illustrating mHealth's potential to optimize health interventions in various contexts (Watterson *et al*, 2015; Jones *et al*, 2020).

The incorporation of advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), wearable devices, and predictive analytics represents another essential aspect of mHealth's success in maternal and child healthcare. AI algorithms assess large datasets derived from wearable sensors to accurately predict risks associated with pregnancy, thereby facilitating personalized care management. Such innovations are crucial in high-income regions where the integration of mHealth is most developed (Balogun, *et al*, 2023). By enhancing risk prediction and enabling continuous monitoring, these technologies significantly mitigate maternal and neonatal health risks (Shorey *et al*, 2018; Li *et al*, 2021; Olajubu *et al*, 2020). Additionally, they allow healthcare providers to propose tailored health pathways, fostering a more

responsive and personalized health system (Babarinde, *et al*, 2023, Müller *et al*, 2016).

Successful mHealth interventions are predicated on several key factors, including community engagement, governmental support, and digital literacy initiatives. Community-driven health education has improved mHealth adoption, especially in South Asia, while supportive government policies and funding are vital for scaling these interventions successfully (Breland *et al*, 2021; Müller *et al*, 2016). Digital literacy training also plays a critical role in ensuring user engagement, particularly in regions where understanding of technology may be limited (Feroz *et al*, 2017; Rivera-Romero *et al*, 2018). Strategic partnerships between healthcare providers and technology developers have also shown promise in overcoming barriers related to infrastructure and accessibility, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of mHealth solutions (Adepoju, *et al*, 2023; Olajubu *et al*, 2022; Bjornsen *et al*, 2014).

In summary, mHealth applications significantly contribute to improving maternal and child health outcomes through innovative solutions that facilitate early risk detection, expand access to healthcare, enhance adherence to care protocols, and integrate advanced digital technologies. The collective evidence supporting the efficacy of mHealth interventions underscores their potential to transform maternal and child healthcare globally by addressing and overcoming long-standing obstacles within healthcare systems (Balogun, *et al*, 2023; Kedi, Ejimuda & Ajegbile, 2024).

2.4 Challenges and barriers to mHealth implementation

Despite significant advancements in mobile health (mHealth) applications aimed at enhancing maternal and child health outcomes, various challenges hinder their broader implementation and effectiveness across diverse regional contexts such as North America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia (Odionu & Ibeh, 2023; Olowe, *et al*, 2024). A primary barrier to the efficacy of mHealth interventions in low-resource areas, particularly in rural Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, is the inadequate infrastructure and connectivity (Balogun, *et al*, 2024; Owoade, *et al*, 2024). Essential services, including SMS-based messaging and remote consultations, falter due to sporadic cellular coverage and unreliable electricity. The lack of reliable network signals impedes real-time information access, crucial for addressing maternal and child health emergencies (Musiimenta *et al*, 2020; Amoakoh-Coleman *et al*, 2016). For instance, areas in Sub-Saharan Africa are often plagued by outages, affecting both telemedicine consultations and the capacity for real-time monitoring (Amoakoh-Coleman *et al*, 2016; Balakrishnan *et al*, 2016). Thus, overcoming such infrastructure deficits necessitates substantial investments by governments and stakeholders to bolster telecommunications and enhance overall connectivity (Balakrishnan *et al*, 2016; Owoade, *et al*, 2024; Paul, *et al*, 2021).

Digital literacy and technological access further compound the barriers to implementing mHealth solutions effectively. Despite widespread mobile phone penetration, there remains a pronounced digital divide, particularly among women in low- and middle-income countries. In many rural circumstances, women's access to mobile devices is limited as they often rely on shared phones, typically controlled by male family members (Bidemi, *et al*, 2021; Chigboh, Zouo & Olamijuwon, 2024). This reliance is coupled with low digital

literacy levels, which obstruct the effective utilization of mHealth applications (Durmuş, 2024; Kumar *et al*, 2019). Additionally, studies highlight that the lack of familiarity with mobile technology can deter low-literacy individuals from benefiting from mHealth interventions, necessitating the development of user-friendly applications and community training initiatives aimed at enhancing digital competencies among vulnerable populations (Durmuş, 2024; Musiimenta *et al*, 2021; Paul, *et al*, 2024).

Technological disparities are also a critical concern, especially in economically challenged regions where access to advanced smartphones—vital for sophisticated mHealth interventions—is restricted. In contrast, higher-income regions, such as North America, have swiftly incorporated advanced digital technologies into maternal healthcare practices, thereby creating a significant divide in mHealth usage across different socio-economic landscapes (Li *et al*, 2013; Tang *et al*, 2019). Addressing these disparities involves strategic resource allocation to ensure equitable access to effective health technologies (Zere *et al*, 2012; Mechael *et al*, 2019).

Data security and privacy issues represent another substantial obstacle that undermines the potential of mHealth applications. The collection and transmission of sensitive health information through mobile platforms raise concerns about privacy breaches and unauthorized access. Individuals are often dissuaded from using mHealth resources due to fear of data mismanagement, particularly in regions with advanced digital technologies (Musiimenta *et al*, 2021; Calderón *et al*, 2017; Schuver, *et al*, 2024). Implementing comprehensive data protection measures, transparent consent protocols, and secure encryption systems is essential for fostering user confidence and promoting sustained engagement with mHealth services globally (Feroz *et al*, 2021; Mechael *et al*, 2019; Paul, Ogugua & Eyo-Udo, 2024). Cultural and ethical considerations significantly influence the acceptance and utilization of mHealth solutions. Many communities exhibit resistance toward technology-driven health interventions due to entrenched cultural attitudes that favor face-to-face interactions over digital engagements, particularly for sensitive health matters (Chigboh, Zouo & Olamijuwon, 2024; Musiimenta *et al*, 2021). In areas with strict gender norms, women's autonomy regarding health technology access is often limited, further complicating mHealth adoption. To navigate these cultural barriers effectively, mHealth programs must engage in community-based approaches that incorporate local customs and languages (Feroz *et al*, 2021; He *et al*, 2024; Shittu, *et al*, 2024).

Additionally, regulatory and policy constraints contribute significantly to the fragmented implementation of mHealth across various regions. Rapid technological advancements often outstrip the development of regulatory frameworks, leading to ambiguities concerning accountability, data governance, and compliance (Balakrishnan *et al*, 2016; Dirlikov, 2021; Shittu, *et al*, 2024). In many low-resource settings, the absence of comprehensive guidelines results in inconsistent practices, hampering the scalability of mHealth solutions (Hassoon & Abdulwahid, 2018; Shittu, *et al*, 2024). Conversely, stringent regulations in regions like North America can sometimes hinder innovation, highlighting the need for balanced regulations that promote innovation while ensuring privacy and patient protection (Dirlikov, *et al*, 2021; He *et al*, 2024). Collaborative efforts among policymakers,

health organizations, and community stakeholders are paramount to developing agile regulatory frameworks that adapt to technological changes and improve the quality of maternal and child health outcomes (Li *et al*, 2013; Soyege, *et al*, 2024).

In conclusion, while mHealth holds transformative potential for improving maternal and child health outcomes globally, various challenges hinder its effective implementation across different regional contexts. Addressing issues related to infrastructure inadequacies, digital literacy, technological disparities, data security, ethical and cultural resistance, and policy constraints is crucial for enhancing the adoption and sustainability of mHealth initiatives (Edoh, *et al*, 2024; Soyege, *et al*, 2024; Temedie-Asogwa, *et al*, 2024). Strategic investments, capacity-building efforts, and collaborative policymaking are essential to leverage mHealth's full capabilities in revolutionizing maternal and child health service delivery worldwide.

2.5 Policy recommendations and future directions

The successful leveraging of mobile health (mHealth) applications to enhance maternal and child health outcomes requires strategic policy interventions and targeted investments, particularly given the implementation barriers across diverse global contexts like North America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia. Research indicates that while mHealth technologies offer significant potential for improving health services, their effectiveness is often limited by systemic challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, lack of trained personnel, and regulatory hurdles (Feroz *et al*, 2017; Sondaal *et al*, 2016; Ugwuoke, *et al*, 2024). Experiences from these regions demonstrate the necessity of comprehensive policy measures that align with local health priorities and the operational realities of mHealth implementation (Gilano *et al*, 2024; Kruse *et al*, 2019).

Strategic public-private partnerships (PPPs) are vital in expanding the adoption of mHealth applications. Collaborative efforts between governments and private entities, such as telecommunications companies, have shown success in enhancing the reach of mHealth initiatives in countries like India and Bangladesh. Such partnerships facilitate resource pooling, risk-sharing, and infrastructure development, ultimately leading to sustainable mHealth solutions (Balogun *et al*, 2020; Hategeka *et al*, 2019; Uwumiro, *et al*, 2023). Policymakers are encouraged to incentivize these collaborations through subsidies or tax breaks, ensuring that clear regulatory guidelines define roles and accountability. This strategic alignment enables ambitious technological integration and paves the way for advancements like AI and blockchain that individual stakeholders may find financially prohibitive (Amoakoh-Coleman *et al*, 2016; Uwumiro, *et al*, 2024; Zakerabasali *et al*, 2021).

To scale mHealth interventions effectively, robust governmental and healthcare institutional support is essential. Policymakers must integrate mHealth strategies within national and regional health plans, accompanied by dedicated funding. Experiences in North America have illustrated that embedding mHealth solutions into existing healthcare structures significantly enhances their adoption rates (Kabongo *et al*, 2019; Adam *et al*, 2021). Furthermore, investments in technological infrastructure—particularly in underserved areas of Sub-Saharan Africa—are crucial. This includes enhancing broadband access and cellular networks,

coupled with staff training on integrating mobile technologies into clinical practice. By solidifying the infrastructural backbone, stakeholders can ensure smooth mHealth integration into routine health services (Uwumiro, *et al*, 2024; Żarnowski *et al*, 2022; Feroz *et al*, 2017).

Ensuring data security and establishing strong regulatory frameworks are paramount for the continued growth of mHealth technologies. Data privacy concerns must be addressed comprehensively through regulations modeled after established standards, such as the GDPR. This entails enforcing stringent data protection protocols to foster public trust in mHealth applications, particularly for sensitive maternal and child health data (Pai & Alathur, 2020; Zouo & Olamijuwon, 2024). Institutions must adhere to set standards, employing encryption and rigorous access controls to mitigate cybersecurity threats. As trust in mHealth systems grows, user engagement and application uptake will also increase (Edoh, *et al*, 2024; Ojo, 2018; Muir *et al*, 2020).

Future policy directions must leverage advanced technologies such as 5G and AI to improve the effectiveness of mHealth solutions. The benefits of 5G, including enhanced connectivity and reduced latency, are particularly promising for real-time health monitoring and teleconsultations, making it essential for both governments and healthcare institutions to prioritize investments in this technology (Keyworth *et al*, 2018; Decker *et al*, 2022). The integration of blockchain can similarly provide improved data security and user accountability. Policymakers should therefore foster an environment conducive to research and funding in AI-driven health solutions, particularly those that support maternal healthcare (Bhat *et al*, 2020; Zouo & Olamijuwon, 2024).

Lastly, enhancing mHealth literacy among healthcare workers is critical for maximizing intervention effectiveness. Policymakers must implement comprehensive training programs that equip healthcare workers with the necessary skills to utilize mHealth applications effectively (Chivilgina *et al*, 2020; Efobi, *et al*, 2023). Continuous education ensures that health workers can navigate technological challenges and apply culturally appropriate practices within their communities, thereby overcoming barriers associated with digital literacy and reluctance to adopt new technologies (Elufioye, *et al*, 2024; Ruton *et al*, 2018).

In conclusion, the strategic advancement of mHealth technologies for improving maternal and child health hinges on targeted policy initiatives focusing on partnership development, institutional support, regulatory frameworks, and workforce training. By aligning these efforts, stakeholders can leverage mobile health innovations to not only enhance health outcomes but also bridge significant health disparities globally (Elujide, *et al*, 2021; Fagbule, *et al*, 2023).

3. Conclusion

This cross-regional study on leveraging Mobile Health (mHealth) applications for improving maternal and child health outcomes underscores the profound potential of digital health innovations in transforming global healthcare delivery. Across regions including North America, Sub-Saharan Africa, and South Asia, mHealth interventions have demonstrated significant effectiveness in addressing persistent healthcare challenges, particularly in reducing maternal and child mortality. The evidence reviewed consistently supports the assertion that mobile-based healthcare solutions offer unique capabilities, such as real-

time risk monitoring, teleconsultations, targeted educational interventions, and personalized healthcare delivery. These capabilities substantially enhance healthcare accessibility and quality, thus significantly lowering mortality rates among mothers and children. Particularly, successful examples from North America highlight advanced mHealth applications integrated with artificial intelligence (AI) and big data analytics that enable early detection and proactive management of maternal health complications. Concurrently, experiences in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia illustrate how mobile health solutions effectively improve healthcare delivery and outcomes in low-resource settings by overcoming geographic, infrastructural, and sociocultural barriers.

Despite these achievements, numerous implementation challenges remain prevalent, including inadequate digital infrastructure, limited technological access, insufficient digital literacy, data privacy concerns, cultural barriers, and regulatory constraints. Addressing these barriers through strategic interventions and tailored policy recommendations will significantly amplify the impact of mHealth applications. Strengthening public-private partnerships, enhancing governmental support, implementing rigorous data protection frameworks, and investing in digital literacy and training programs for healthcare workers are essential for sustaining and scaling successful mHealth implementations. Additionally, integrating advanced technologies, notably 5G networks, blockchain security measures, and AI-driven analytics, represents a promising frontier for the future evolution of mHealth, facilitating highly responsive, secure, and personalized maternal and child healthcare delivery.

Future research directions must therefore prioritize exploring the full potential of emerging technological advancements. Specifically, investigating the effectiveness and feasibility of 5G-enabled remote healthcare services will be essential in expanding the reach and responsiveness of mHealth interventions. The high-speed connectivity and reduced latency offered by 5G technology could revolutionize telemedicine capabilities, allowing high-quality remote consultations, real-time health monitoring, and advanced data transmission capabilities even in resource-constrained regions. Similarly, exploring the application of AI-driven behavioral analytics represents another critical area for future research. AI analytics can identify nuanced behavioral patterns associated with maternal health risks, predict adherence to prenatal care protocols, and provide customized interventions that improve health behaviors. This proactive approach, informed by predictive algorithms and advanced data analytics, holds considerable promise for optimizing maternal and child health outcomes across diverse socioeconomic and geographic contexts.

In conclusion, mHealth applications possess immense transformative potential in bridging global health disparities, particularly concerning maternal and child health. By overcoming traditional barriers such as geographic isolation, limited infrastructure, and socioeconomic inequalities, mobile health solutions have already demonstrated their effectiveness in significantly reducing maternal and child mortality globally. Future innovations and research must continue to build upon this foundation, fully leveraging advanced digital technologies to drive further improvements in health outcomes. Ultimately, mHealth represents a crucial tool in global health strategies, offering scalable, equitable, and sustainable solutions capable of significantly narrowing

global maternal and child health disparities and improving health equity worldwide.

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