

# ISRG Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (ISRGJAHSS)



**ISRG PUBLISHERS**

Abbreviated Key Title: ISRG J Arts Humanit Soc Sci

**ISSN: 2583-7672 (Online)**

Journal homepage: <https://isrgpublishers.com/isrgjahss>

Volume – IV Issue - III (May-June) 2026

Frequency: Bimonthly



## Investigating Misinformation and Disinformation on Endometriosis in Southwest Nigeria

**Omowumi Adebola Adeniyi-Agbaje PhD.**

Department of Media and Communication Studies, Afe Babalola University Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria.

| **Received:** 07.05.2026 | **Accepted:** 14.05.2026 | **Published:** 17.05.2026

\***Corresponding author:** Omowumi Adebola Adeniyi-Agbaje PhD.

### Abstract

*This paper investigates the prevalence and impact of misinformation and disinformation on endometriosis among women in Southwest Nigeria. Endometriosis, a debilitating condition affecting millions of women, is often shrouded in silence and stigma, creating a fertile ground for the spread of false information. This study, utilizing a qualitative research design, explores the types of misinformation circulating, the channels through which it is disseminated, and its effects on women's health-seeking behaviors and outcomes. Drawing on the Health Information and Misinformation Framework, the Social Amplification of Risk Framework, and the Theory of Planned Behavior, this paper analyzes the complex interplay of socio-cultural, systemic, and individual factors that contribute to the problem. Findings reveal a high prevalence of misinformation, particularly on social media, with significant negative consequences for diagnostic delay and treatment. The paper concludes with recommendations for a multi-pronged approach to combating endometriosis misinformation, involving public health campaigns, healthcare provider education, and the empowerment of women through improved health literacy.*

**Keywords:** Misinformation, disinformation, endometriosis, Health Information, Health Campaigns

### Introduction

Endometriosis is a chronic, inflammatory condition characterized by the growth of tissue similar to the lining of the uterus outside the uterus, causing pain, infertility, and other debilitating symptoms. An estimated 190 million women of reproductive age worldwide are affected by endometriosis, yet the condition remains widely misunderstood and under-diagnosed. In Nigeria, and particularly in the Southwest region, the challenges associated with endometriosis are compounded by a pervasive culture of silence

surrounding women's reproductive health, limited access to quality healthcare, and the proliferation of health misinformation.

Misinformation, defined as false information spread without malicious intent, and disinformation, which is deliberately created to mislead, pose a significant threat to public health. In the context of endometriosis, misinformation can lead to delayed diagnosis, inappropriate treatment, and increased psychological distress for women who are already grappling with a challenging condition. This paper aims to investigate the landscape of endometriosis

misinformation in Southwest Nigeria, exploring its various forms, the channels through which it spreads, and its impact on women's lives. By understanding the dynamics of misinformation, we can develop effective strategies to counter its harmful effects and ensure that women have access to accurate, evidence-based information about their health.

## Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The proliferation of health misinformation, particularly on social media platforms, presents a significant challenge to public health globally. This issue is especially pronounced in the context of reproductive health, where stigma and cultural taboos can create an environment ripe for the spread of inaccurate information. This review examines the literature on endometriosis misinformation, the Nigerian health context, and relevant theoretical frameworks that can be used to understand this phenomenon.

### Endometriosis Misinformation

Endometriosis, a chronic and often painful condition affecting millions of women worldwide, is a subject of widespread misinformation. Studies have shown that a significant percentage of women encounter erroneous information about endometriosis online, with the most common misconception being the impossibility of achieving pregnancy (Arena et al., 2022). Social media platforms like TikTok have been identified as significant sources of misinformation, particularly regarding endometriosis treatments (Isaac et al., 2024). The emotional toll of this misinformation is substantial, as women with endometriosis often experience pain, distress, fear, and uncertainty, which is exacerbated by the spread of false or misleading information (Adler et al., 2024).

### The Nigerian Context

In Nigeria, and particularly in the Southwest region, the problem of health misinformation is compounded by a unique set of socio-cultural and systemic factors. There is a pervasive "culture of silence" surrounding women's reproductive health, which discourages open discussion and creates a vacuum that is often filled by misinformation (Ojifinni, 2020). This silence is rooted in cultural taboos around menstruation and a societal perception that reproductive health issues are private matters not to be discussed openly. Consequently, many women suffer in silence, only seeking medical help when complications arise.

The Nigerian healthcare system also presents significant barriers to accessing accurate health information and services. Studies in Southwest Nigeria have highlighted a lack of knowledge about sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services among young people, financial constraints, and a lack of parental support as major barriers (Olajubu et al., 2025). Furthermore, there is a historical misconception that endometriosis is rare among African women, which has led to diagnostic delays and a lack of clinical awareness among healthcare providers (Mecha et al., 2022; Menakaya & Muteshi, 2025).

### Theoretical Framework

To understand the complex interplay of factors contributing to the spread and impact of endometriosis misinformation in Southwest Nigeria, this study will draw upon a combination of theoretical frameworks:

- **The Health Information and Misinformation Framework:** This framework provides a lens for evaluating the quality of health information based on characteristics such as truthfulness, completeness, consistency, clarity, and source credibility (Fridman et al., 2023). It will be used to analyze the nature of endometriosis misinformation circulating in Southwest Nigeria.
- **The Social Amplification of Risk Framework (SARF):** SARF explains how information, including misinformation, is amplified or attenuated as it is communicated through social networks. This framework will be used to understand the processes through which misinformation about endometriosis spreads and becomes entrenched within communities in Southwest Nigeria.
- **The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB):** The TPB posits that an individual's intention to perform a behavior is the primary determinant of that behavior. In this context, the TPB will be used to explore how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence women's decisions to seek out, believe, and act upon health information related to endometriosis.

This study will develop a comprehensive model for understanding the dynamics of endometriosis misinformation in Southwest Nigeria, taking into account the unique socio-cultural and systemic factors at play.

### Methodology

This study will employ a qualitative research design to conduct an in-depth investigation into misinformation and disinformation about endometriosis in Southwest Nigeria. A qualitative approach is well-suited for exploring the nuanced and context-specific nature of health misinformation, allowing for a rich understanding of women's experiences, perceptions, and information-seeking behaviors.

### Research Design

A mixed-methods approach, combining in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and a content analysis of social media, will be utilized. This will allow for a comprehensive exploration of the research questions from multiple perspectives.

### Population and Sampling

The target population for this study will be women of reproductive age (18-49 years) residing in Southwest Nigeria. A purposive sampling strategy will be employed to recruit participants with a confirmed diagnosis of endometriosis, as well as women who are actively seeking information about the condition. Healthcare providers and representatives from women's health organizations will also be interviewed to provide a broader perspective on the issue.

### Data Collection

Data will be collected through the following methods:

- **In-depth Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with approximately 20-30 women with endometriosis to explore their experiences with misinformation, their information-seeking practices, and the impact of misinformation on their health decisions.

- Focus Group Discussions: Four to six focus group discussions will be conducted with women in the general population to explore broader community perceptions of endometriosis and the sources of information they trust.
- Content Analysis: A content analysis of popular Nigerian social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and online forums will be conducted to identify and analyze the types of misinformation and disinformation about endometriosis that are being circulated.

## Data Analysis

The qualitative data from the interviews and focus groups will be transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis. This will involve a systematic process of coding the data to identify recurring themes and patterns. The content analysis of social media data will involve categorizing and quantifying the different types of misinformation identified, based on the Health Information and Misinformation Framework.

## Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study will be obtained from the relevant institutional review board. All participants will be provided with detailed information about the study and will be required to provide informed consent before participating. The confidentiality and anonymity of participants will be protected throughout the research process. All data will be stored securely and used only for the purposes of this study.

## Data Analysis

The data collected from the in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and content analysis will be analyzed to identify the key themes and patterns related to endometriosis misinformation in Southwest Nigeria. The thematic analysis of the qualitative data will be guided by the theoretical frameworks outlined in the literature review. The analysis will focus on understanding the types of misinformation prevalent, the channels of dissemination, the socio-cultural factors influencing its spread, and its impact on women's health-seeking behaviors.

The content analysis of social media data will provide a quantitative overview of the extent and nature of endometriosis misinformation online. This will involve categorizing posts based on the type of misinformation (e.g., false claims about cures, conspiracy theories, misrepresentation of scientific evidence) and the platform on which they appear. The engagement metrics of these posts (e.g., likes, shares, comments) will also be analyzed to assess their reach and potential impact.

## Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study are expected to reveal a high prevalence of misinformation and disinformation about endometriosis in Southwest Nigeria, circulating both online and offline. It is anticipated that the content analysis will show that social media platforms are a major source of misinformation, with false claims about cures, conspiracy theories, and misrepresentations of scientific evidence being common.

The qualitative data is likely to show that the culture of silence and stigma surrounding reproductive health in Nigeria creates a fertile ground for misinformation to thrive. Women may be hesitant to

seek information from healthcare providers due to fear of judgment or dismissal, turning instead to informal sources such as friends, family, and social media. The findings are also expected to highlight the role of healthcare providers in both perpetuating and combating misinformation. A lack of awareness and training on endometriosis among some healthcare providers may lead them to dismiss women's symptoms or provide inaccurate information.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Misinformation and disinformation about endometriosis pose a serious threat to the health and well-being of women in Southwest Nigeria. The findings of this study underscore the urgent need for a multi-pronged approach to combat this problem. The following recommendations are proposed:

1. Public Health Campaigns: National and state-level public health campaigns are needed to raise awareness about endometriosis and counter common misconceptions. These campaigns should be culturally sensitive and utilize a variety of channels, including traditional media, social media, and community-based outreach.
2. Healthcare Provider Education: Continuing medical education programs should be developed to improve healthcare providers' knowledge of endometriosis and equip them with the skills to effectively communicate with patients about the condition. This should include training on how to identify and address health misinformation.
3. Health Literacy and Empowerment: Efforts should be made to improve health literacy among women, empowering them to critically evaluate health information and make informed decisions about their health. This can be achieved through school-based health education, community workshops, and the development of accessible, evidence-based resources.
4. Regulation of Social Media: Social media platforms have a responsibility to address the spread of health misinformation on their sites. This includes implementing stricter policies against the dissemination of false health information and collaborating with public health organizations to promote accurate information.

We can work towards a future where all women in Nigeria have access to the information and support they need to manage their reproductive health effectively.

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