

An Investigation into Health Information Environment of Market Women in Offa, Kwara State Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined the health information environment of market women in Offa, a semi-urban area in Kwara State of Nigeria. The aim of the study was to identify the information needs of market women, to investigate the information sources, information seeking behaviour and the challenges associated with the use of information sources. Data was collected through a questionnaire. The return rate of the questionnaire administered was 93.5 percent. The findings revealed that the market women have diverse health information needs which include among others malaria fever, hygiene, anti-natal/post-natal care. The main sources of health information used by the market women include family / neighbours and radio. The study made recommendations such as the state government supporting the state library board. The public library should also assist to provide unlimited access to information through the audio-visual materials.

Keywords: Health information environment, market women, Offa Metropolis

1. Introduction

There is no doubt that information has always played a central role in the life of human beings. It is identified as crucial for human existence and survival. Information is basic human need with an over-riding significance to all individuals. The progress of a society has a lot to do with timely provision of information. Different people in the society today, use information of various kinds to take decisions and make proper planning.

Information environment is about factors that are associated with access to, and the use of information sources by the different categories of people within the society. Oladokun (2012) viewed these factors as components of information environment which include information needs, information seeking behaviour and information sources. According to Mooko and Aina (2007), the context of information environment includes not only the information needs but also the information seeking behaviors, access to information and sources of information used for meeting the information needs of users.

Igwe, Aliyu and Ukah (2014) wrote that the society exists with various groups of individuals such as farmers, teachers, civil servants, artisan, and so on. All these groups of individuals are often in need of information to develop themselves and to contribute towards the development of their society. The market women are women that engage in trading and they directly or indirectly depend on the proceeds of the market income for livelihood. The women are active information seekers; they seek information on various issues especially in the areas of managing their health and that of their family members (Wather and Haris, 2006). The market women are part of the women in the society therefore, there is need to understand health information needs and sources used to satisfy these needs. Most market women in developing countries like Nigeria lack access to health information due to some barriers such as language, level of education and social custom. In addition, some market women had no time to seek basic health information; they however depend on informal sources such as friends and relatives. The crux of this study therefore is to investigate the health information environment of market women in Offa metropolis.

Offa is a metropolis, a town and one of the sixteen local government councils in Kwara state of Nigeria. Offa metropolis is housing tertiary institutions such as the Federal Polytechnic, Kwara state, College of Health Technology and a Naval Health school. There are two major and famous market usually patronized by the people within the town and from neighbouring villages and towns. The markets are known as Owode market and 'Oja Oba' or 'Oja Ale'.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The women today, are seen to be playing multiple roles in our society. These include raising children, doing house chores, engaging in the sale of goods, providing services to support the family. They need to stay healthy so as to be able to cope with these responsibilities. However, little or no access to timely health information or relevant health information sources to satisfy their information needs pose challenges to the market women. Therefore this study sets out to investigate the health information environment of market women in Offa metropolis.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

- i. investigate the health information needs of market women in Offa.
- ii. identify the sources of health information used by market women in Offa metropolis.
- iii. examine information seeking behaviour of the market women in Offa metropolis.
- iv. find out the challenges encountered by market women while seeking for health information.

1.3 Limitations of the Study

Limitations encountered included inability of some of the respondents to fill the questionnaire without the assistance of the researcher. Also, there was difficulty in getting full attention of the respondents as they were busy most of the time, attending to their customers. There was general apathy towards the study itself. However, the limitations were curtailed to the barest minimum so as to prevent it from affecting the outcome of the study.

2. Literature Review

Information environment encapsulates the information needs as well as information seeking behaviours, access to information and sources of information used in meeting the information needs of users (Mooko and Aina, 2007). The needs of women vary but most importantly, they are interested in health related information which will give them the opportunity to live better lives. According to Saleh and Lasisi (2010), health information constitutes 20% of the information needs of women. Mooko (2005) in his studies on information needs and information seeking behaviour of women in three villages in Botswana revealed that most of the information needs of these women are health related. They seek information on particular diseases, how they are contracted and how to treat them.

Adam and Fatima (2011) sees the most paramount health information required by women to be pre-natal and post natal care, immunizations on childhood killer diseases, how to prevent and manage Vascular Vagina Fistula (VVF) and information on safe delivery and how to prevent and control epidemics such as cholera and meningitis. They added that health information need required by women generally is hinged to hygiene, good food, family planning and clean environment.

Ndikom and Ofi (2012) opined that women in developing countries like Nigeria seem to utilize reproductive services more during pregnancy. They also use the services for post-natal checkup family planning and any gynecological problem.

A study carried out by Momodu (2002) also on information needs and information seeking behaviour of rural dwellers in Nigeria, the information needed by women was particularly on pre and post natal care and current immunization facilities for their children.

3. Methodology

The study adopted survey research design, with a structured questionnaire as tool for data collection. The questionnaire has two sections, section A is on the demographic data of the respondents and the section B deals with the study objectives. No sample and sampling technique was adopted, since the exact population of the market women was not known. Two hundred copies of the questionnaire were administered to the market women with the assistance of three trained research assistants.

4. Findings and Discussion

Out of the 200 copies of questionnaire administered, five were returned unfilled, eight were not properly filled. Thus, in the long run, the research made use of 187 copies of questionnaire representing 93.5% of the questionnaire found useable and presented for data analysis.

Table 1: Age group of the respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
20-25	21	11.2
26-30	34	18.7
31 – 35	45	24.1
36 – 40	49	26.2
41 years and above	37	19.8
Total	187	100

Table 1 shows that the respondents of the study fall within different age groups. The highest percentage (26.2%) are within the age group of 36-40. 37(19.8%) of the respondents are above 41 years. The lowest percentage 21 (11.2%) are within the age group of 20-25 years. It can be observed that majority of the respondents are above 30 years old.

Table 2: Marital status of the respondents

Marital status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Single	35	18.7
Married	152	81.3
Divorce	0	0
Widow	0	0
Total	187	100

There is no doubt that individual's marital status could influence the health information need. Table 2 showed that majority of the respondents 152 (81.3%) were married and 35 (18.7%) were singles. There was no divorce and none was a widow.

Table 3: Educational Level of the respondents

Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Primary school certificate	98	52.4
Secondary school certificate	30	16
Higher education e.g ND, NCE	19	10.2
No education certificate	40	21.4
Total	187	100

Table 3 showed the educational level of the respondents more than half of the respondents 98 representing the highest percentage 52.4%, had primary school education; 40 (21.4%) had no certificate; 30 (16%) possessed secondary school certificate; 19 (10.2%) which happened to be the least percentage had higher certificates. However it was observed that majority of the respondents had at least primary education.

Table 4: Health Information Needs of the Market Women (Multiple responses)

Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Anti-natal and post-natal care	115	61.5
Family planning	105	56.1
Safe pregnancy delivery	84	44.9
Immunization	90	48.1
Hygiene	187	100
Prevent of HIV/AIDS	105	56.1
Prevention of cancer	95	50.8
Food and nutrition	120	64.2
Malaria fever	187	100
Hypertension	76	40.6
Diabetes	52	27.8
Maternal health and menstrual cycle	48	25.6

Table 4 showed that the highest percentage of the respondents 187 (100%) needed health information on hygiene and malaria fever. This is followed by information on food and nutrition 120 (64.2%); 115 (61.5%) indicated anti-natal and post-natal care; 105 (56.1%) indicated information on prevention of HIV/AIDS and family planning. The least percentage 48 (25.6%) indicated maternal health and menstrual cycle. It can be observed that all the market women were interested in information that relates directly to general health issues as shown in the number that indicated hygiene and malaria fever. Another significant percentage indicated information that relates to child delivery and family planning. The lowest percentage of the respondents needed information on maternal health and menstrual cycle. On the whole it is obvious from the table that market women require health information on hygiene, malaria fever and child bearing related issues. This finding reaffirms Adam and Fatima (2011) which viewed these health information needs as paramount to women.

Table 5: Sources of Health Information used by market women (Multiple responses)

Sources	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Television	90	48.1
Radio	177	94.6
Community health workers	84	44.9
Library	0	0
News papers	21	11.0
Internet	12	6.4
Local government worker	21	11.2
Religious leaders	52	27.8
Friends/neighbours	173	92.5
Community leaders	13	6.9

The study as revealed in Table 5 shows that television and radio are useful sources through which the

market women access information. Although, majority of these respondents use more than one source of information. The most significant percentage 177 (94.6%) of the respondent get information on health through radio. This percentage is followed by those that indicated friends/neighbours which are 173 (92.5%). Those that indicated television are 90 (48.1%); 84 (44.9%) indicated community health workers. The percentages of those that indicated newspapers, internet and community leaders were insignificant. It is quite amazing that none of the respondents use the library as source of information. This findings reaffirms Haliso and Alao (2013) and Mooko (2005) which revealed that the sources of information consulted and used by women were radio, friends, neighbours and relatives.

Table 6: Health Information Seeking Behaviour of Mark Women

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Self-administration of known herbal or modern medicine	63	33.7
Visit nearby chemists	23	12.3
Consult friends/neighbours	45	24.
Libraries/information centres	-	-
Public health centres	40	21.4
Visit spiritual/faith healers	16	8.5
Total	187	100

Table 6 reveals the health information seeking behaviour of market women. Majority of the respondents 63(33.7%) admitted practicing self-administration of known herbal or modern medicine. 45(24.1) consulted friends/neighbours; 40 (21.4%) visited public health centres; 16(8.5%) visited spiritual/faith healers while none of the respondents indicated library/information centres. There appeared to be lack of knowledge about the roles of library among the respondents, despite that quite a good number of them are literates.

Table 7: Challenges to seeking health information

Response	Frequency	Percentage %
Inadequate power supply to listen to media	45	24.1
Language barrier	29	15.5
Inability to read or comprehend some health information sources	61	32.6
Lack of Time	42	22.5
Poor Economic Status	10	5.3
Total	187	100

Table 7 reveals the challenges to seeking health information by the respondents. It was found out that the most significant percentage 61(32.6%) identified their inability to read some health information sources as a challenge. This was followed by inadequate power supply which was identified by 45 (24.1%); lack of time was identified by 42(22.5%); 29(15.5%) claimed language barrier while the least percentage 10(5.3%) claimed poor economic status.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The objectives of this study as highlighted earlier have been achieved following the findings as analysed in the work. The study aimed at investigating the health information environment of market women in offa, Kwara State. The findings of the study revealed that the health information needs and sources of the market women varied. The information seeking behaviour of market women has been expressed in different forms. The analysis revealed that the market women gathered their health information by discussing with friends and by listening to radio. However, the market women encounter some challenges in seeking for information which include inability to read and inadequate power supply. Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made.

- The Public library in the state should make frantic effort to assist market women to have unlimited access to health information. The community library should become more functional having the market women in mind, by acquiring materials produced with local languages. The state government should support the information providers by providing fund for the acquisition of information resources.
- Efforts should also be made by health workers to discourage market women from having total dependence on self-administration of known herbal or modern medicine
- Awareness programmes should be held for market women to help them identify with public libraries and their roles in the society. The public library can also sensitize them on how and where to access information.
- Health information materials should be produced or written in local languages for the sake of the market women
- The libraries should be encouraged to disseminate health information to the market women, through audio-visual materials such as posters and so on. Traditional communications through dramas and songs could also be used as means of communication.

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