

HEALTH INFORMATION NEEDS AND HEALTH INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOUR OF THE RESIDENTS OF JOS AND ENVIRONS

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ABSTRACT

Aim: To investigate the health information needs and health information seeking behaviour of the people of Jos and environs.

Methods: The study was a cross sectional study design; with a study population consisting of individuals of both sexes living within the metropolis of Jos, cutting across people between the age of 10 years and above. The purpose of the study was explained to the target population and their consent individually obtained before a semi-structured interviewer questionnaire was administered to all the eligible participants in the survey. **Results:** The result shows that majority (90.5%) of the respondents said that health workers are the common source of health information, followed by television (70%),

and radio (48.5%) in their areas; with 88.5% of them admitting that health workers are the appropriate source for seeking health information. When asked of their reasons for seeking health information; 87.6% of the respondents said it was for treatment of diseases. This is not unconnected with the levels of education of the respondents in which about 57.6% of them had secondary education. Similarly, 81.7% of the respondents perceived environment as a factor influencing their health information needs and information seeking behaviours. **Conclusion:** The study shows that the respondents had good knowledge of the sources/formats of health information and reasons for seeking health information, with majority of them agreeing that environmental factors influences their health information needs and health information seeking behaviours. There is therefore need for proper information dissemination to the respondents in order to preserve their own health and the

healthy environment of their surroundings which will help in solving some of the health needs as well as promoting good health among the citizens.

KEYWORDS: Health, Information needs, Information seeking, Behaviours, Education.

INTRODUCTION

Information needs is a recognition that the knowledge an individual has is inadequate to satisfy a purpose that he/she needs to achieve. That is, when there is knowledge gap in people to satisfy their goal; while information seeking behavior is the purposive seeking of information as a consequence of a need to satisfy some goal. That is, information seeking behavior refers to the way people search for and utilizes information. ^[1,2]

Generally, to be in a state of good health means different things to different people; for instance, many people may consider themselves being healthy when they are not suffering from a disease or disability; in the same way, those with a disease or disability may consider themselves as being healthy if they are able to manage their condition such that it does not have great impact on their quality of life. The World Health Organization has defined health as “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well being and not the mere absence of disease or infirmity”. ^[3]

Health care has changed significantly over the last few decades, with greater emphasis on self-management for long time health conditions and personal responsibility for maintaining good health. ^[4] This has been possible because information concerning the underlying social, economic and environmental conditions impacting on health, as well as individual risk factors and risk behaviours, and use of the health care system are continuously improving. Previous studies have shown low rate of health literacy among people, especially in developing countries including Nigeria. ^[5] The need for health information among people is therefore an important element of effective, empathetic and honest communication between public and health personnel. ^[6,7] Health information seeking is another area in which people look for information and create interventions in support of their wellbeing. ^[8] For instance, a person may not know clearly about a particular health problem; that represents a knowledge gap of the disease, so there is a need to look up detailed information on this problem. Health Information Seeking Behavior (HISB) is broadly viewed as the ways by which individuals obtain information about health, illness, health promotion and risks to health. ^[9]

Studies have shown that lay-people increasingly choose to obtain information on their own when they encounter health problems.^[10,11] Marchionini (2006)^[12] in his studies have shown the health information needs and health information seeking behaviours of farmers at Kilimanjaro of Tanzania. Similar study was carried out by Bakar (2011)^[13] in Malaysian women and found that people mostly depends on newspapers, magazines, village clinics, television and radio for information on health.

The level of education and social group of people are therefore important in navigating health systems and in getting the right care when needed.^[14] Literature search has shown that not much study has been done on health information needs and health information seeking behaviours of people in this part of the world. The aim of the study, therefore, was to investigate how the people of Jos and environs identify their source of health information and their information seeking behaviour for the purpose of maintaining good health.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Location

The study was conducted in Jos and environs of Plateau state. It is located in the Nigeria's middle belt. According to the 2006 census, the state is home to 5, 178, 712.^[15]

Study Design

The study design selected was a cross-sectional survey. An assessment of health information needs and health information seeking behaviours was made across Jos and environs.

Sample selection

Sample selection involved the use of two stage cluster random sampling procedure at the district level to select sub-districts and zone from where the study sample could be drawn. In each districts, the area was broken down to sub-districts from which three zones were selected based on population within the selected zones, households were randomly numbered and houses assigned (odd number) were selected in to the final sample. A key decision maker respondent (male or female) was identified for interview in the final sample population.

Data Collection

The study population consisted of individuals of all age group living within the metropolis of Jos; this cut-across pupils in primary schools, secondary school students, and students in the

tertiary institutions, traders in their market place, and workers in the offices and residents in Jos metropolis.

The purpose of the study was explained to target population and their consent individually obtained before the questionnaire was administered. Data was collected using a semi-structured interviewer and was administered to all eligible participants in the survey.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analysis was done using the SPSS version 20.0 software programmer, statistical measures used include; frequencies, means and standard deviation, significant test of association.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 shows demographic characteristics of respondents. More than 4 out of every respondent were within 20 – 29 years age category (40.7%).

Table1: Demographic characteristics of respondents (410)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age category (in years)		
10 – 19	53	12.9
20 – 29	167	40.7
30 – 39	117	28.5
40 – 49	46	11.2
≥ 50	27	6.6
Gender		
Male	251	61.2
Female	159	38.8
Marital status		
Single	223	54.4
Married	183	44.6
Divorced	3	0.7
Widowed	1	0.2
Academic qualification		
No formal education	10	2.4
Primary	24	5.9
Secondary	237	57.6
Tertiary	139	33.9
Occupation		
Civil servants	47	11.5
Business	242	59.0
Farming	3	0.7

Students	55	13.4
Others	41	10.0
Average monthly income (in ₦)		
≤ 5, 000	15	3.7
6, 000 – 10, 000	49	12.0
11, 000 – 20, 000	40	9.8
21, 000 – 25, 000	60	14.6
≥ 26, 000	175	42.7

Cumulative % less than 100 was due to non-response

Sources of Health Information

The result of the study showed that the most readily available source of information to the respondents were health workers (90.5%), Television (70%), and Radio (48.5%), with internet carry only 15.4% (Figure 1).

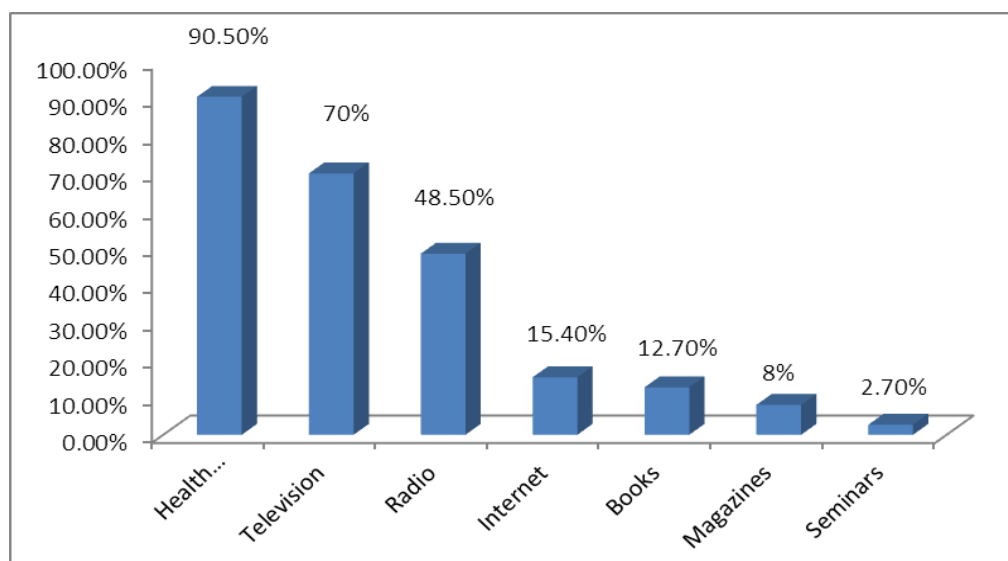


Fig1: Respondents' Sources of Health Information

Appropriate Sources of Health Information

When the respondents were requested to indicate what they thought was the appropriate source of health information; 88.5% of the respondents preferred contacting health worker as their appropriate source for seeking health information (Figure 2).

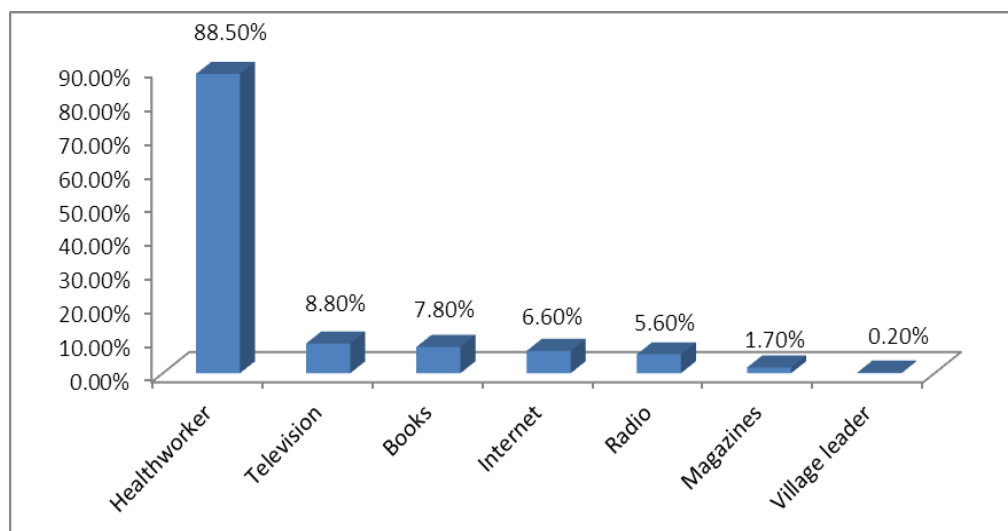


Fig 2: Respondents' Perception of Appropriate Sources of Health Information

Reasons for Seeking Health Information

When the respondents were asked what their reasons for seeking health information were, 0.5% said that it was to find out about the knowledge of disease transmission, 4.6% said that their reason was to promote their health, while 6.3% said that it was for counselling, and 42.9% said that it was for prevention of diseases. Also, 87.6% said that it was for treatment of diseases.

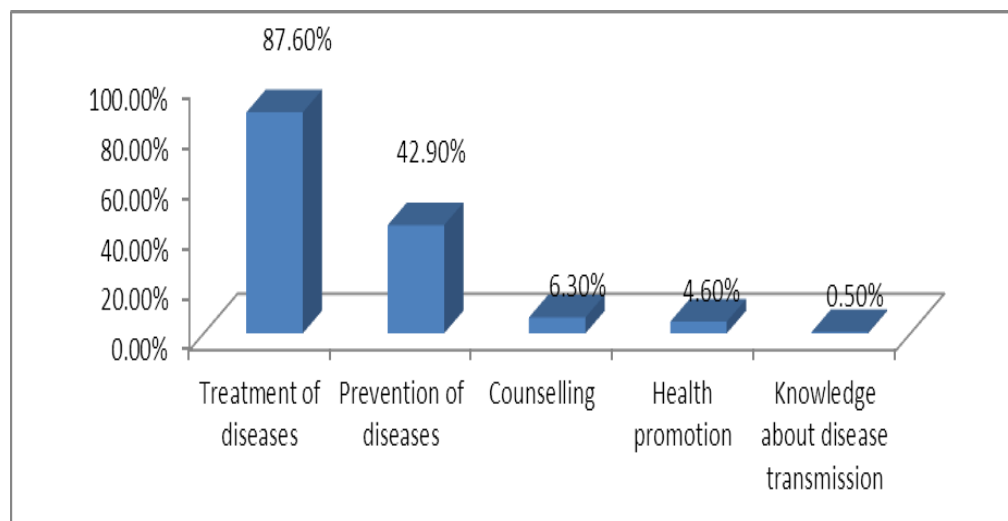


Fig 3: Respondents' Reasons for Seeking Health Information

Factors Influencing Health Information Seeking Behaviour.

Fig 4 shows the various factors that influenced the respondents' health information seeking behaviour. Over 80% perceived the environment as a factor influencing their health information seeking behaviour.

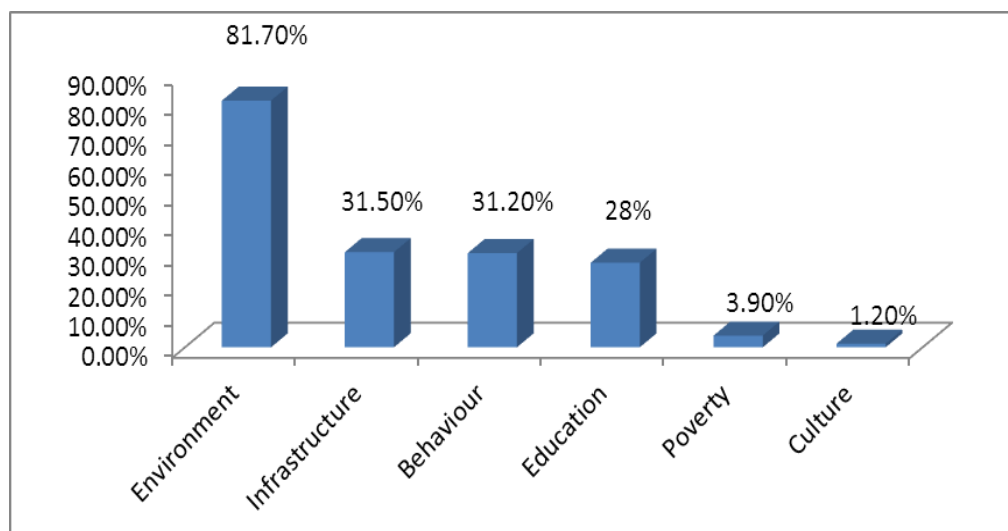


Fig 4: Respondents' Perception of Factors Influencing Health Information Seeking Behaviour

DISCUSSION

Health information availability to common man remains a big problem in most parts of the developing countries.^[16,17] The result of this study shows that majority (90.5%) of the respondents said that health workers were their common source of health information, followed by television (70%), and radio (48.5%) in their areas; with only few of them admitting that internet (15.4%), books (12.7%) and magazine (8%) were some of the source of health information (Figure 1). These findings are in agreement with other findings on health information^[10, 11] whereby clients deliberately choose to obtain health information on their own.

There is need to help in improving the health of our citizens, through improvement not only in the health information services in both urban and rural areas, but also the understanding of why and how to use the information by the public. This is because health workers have been reported to provide too little information to people, which could be due to having few health workers especially in the rural areas, or lack of enough time for their clients.^[18]

Studies have also shown that lack of health information has worsened the spread of many diseases due to the ignorance levels of people. For instance, Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) including HIV/AIDS could be easily prevented if awareness was high and relevant information readily accessible for them to take precautions such as safe sex, number of sexual partners and condom use.^[19] The need for health information cannot be over emphasized in

today's ever increasing incidence of diseases. According to Giovanna (2008),^[20] information is a basic right and "health for all is the priority throughout the world".

The high level of acceptance of the respondents (88.5%) to the fact that health workers are the appropriate source for seeking health information and their choice of health workers for disease treatment (87.6%) could be connected to the levels of education of the respondents in which about 57.6% of them had secondary education. This is because it has been documented that the level of education and social group of people are important in navigating health systems and in getting the right care when needed. ^[4,14]

CONCLUSION

The study shows that the respondents had good knowledge of the sources/formats of health information and reasons for seeking health information, with majority of them agreeing that environmental factors influences their health information needs and health information seeking behaviours. There is therefore need for proper information dissemination to the respondents in order to preserve their own health and the healthy environment of their surroundings which will help in solving some of the health needs as well as promoting good health among the citizens.

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