

## **Meal Management Practices of Homemakers in Port Harcourt**

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### **Abstract**

The paper focused on meal management practices of homemakers in Port Harcourt Municipal City. It investigated factors influencing meal management of practices of women, problems women encounter in meal management; and ways of improving meal management. The population comprised all homemakers in main town of Port Harcourt. The study sample was 200, purposively drawn from estimated literate population of 1,500 homemakers in the area. The instrument for data collection was questionnaire. Mean was used to analyze data. The findings reveal among others, that meal management practices of homemakers were influenced by inadequate food money, and lack of nutritional knowledge. The study recommended that homemakers should use enough seafood in meals, and also update their nutritional knowledge to help them make right choices of food.

**Keywords:** Meal, Management, Food, Money, Feeding, Practice

### **Introduction**

Adequate diet or meal contains all the necessary food nutrients (protein, carbohydrate, fats/oils, minerals, and vitamins) in the correct proportions (Olusanya, Eyisi, Anfani-Joe, Ogunyide, and Egbuchulam, 2009; Ojelade and Olaoye, 2010; Ezedum, 2012). In the words of Maynard (2012), an adequate diet is one which meets in full all the nutritional needs of a person. Such diet maintains the body in a state of good health throughout life. Ifeanacho (2009) noted that individuals need to consume specific amounts of various nutrients to stay healthy. Ezedum (2012) stressed that

adequate nutritional practices involve eating food rich in nutrients.

Meal management practice involves the planning of meals and how it is practiced. Anyakoha and Eluwa (2010) wrote that meal planning is a process of designing adequate diets in which all essential nutrients are present in the right proportion, for specific groups of people. According to Anyakoha (2007) meal planning is choosing different foods to produce a meal. Meal management encompasses so many processes which are to plan nutritious meals, ensure to get all the nutrients that you need, serve satisfying meals but manage daily

calorie/servings, control costs, conserve time, practice safety and sanitary food handling (Donalley, 2012; Ask.com, 2014). Develop shopping list, plan menu of meals, shop for groceries, cook meals, and serve the meals as important aspects of meal management (My Crazy Organized Life, 2011).

Every day people take meals in different forms, but the decision of which meal to prepare and or how intelligent or appropriate the meal is regarding the family wellbeing is influenced by many factors. The factors affecting meal management practices are poor nutritional knowledge, management skills and inadequate food money. Anyakoha (2007) noted that money available affects the quality and quantity of meal planning and preparation. Igba (2009) stressed that most households do not have enough to meet their basic needs; lack of power to facilitate cool storage of flesh foods (meat and fish); high cost of protein foods; wholesome foods and clean/hygienic food market. According to Anozie (2009a) purchasing food ingredients and inputs from clean environment and hygienic principles are important in meal preparation and management practices. Other factors include needs of family members based on age, occupation, health condition, and likes and dislikes of members; size of the family; equipment or facilities available; time available; locality; and seasonal factors (Anyakoha, 2007; Ifeanacho, 2009). Utilizing foods in season helps, because Igbemi and Lilly

(2011) noted that when foods are in season, the foods are cheaper, fresher and tastier.

Management of meals should incorporate process of management of planning, organizing, directing and evaluation. Concisely, the feeding money being used judiciously to ensure nutritional wellbeing and avoiding food wastage is as result of managerial skill application in the kitchen. From time to time the nutritional wellbeing should be appraised to ascertain whether there will be need for diet modification (Anyakoha and Eluwa, 2010; Lilly, 2004; Ifeanacho, 2009). With little planning, home makers can create a menu structure that gives their family the freedom to make healthy eating choices (WebMD, 2012).

Meal management could be hampered by so many economic factors. Brownson (2009) noted that hunger and malnutrition exist amidst plenty because substantial numbers of people do not have the money to buy nutritious food. Protein is the actual limiting nutritional factor, yet local and imported source of protein is out of the reach of the ordinary Nigerian. Igbemi and Lilly (2011) commented that staple food items like rice, yam flour, beans and even garri were sold at prices that were clearly beyond the reach of most Nigerians. According to Igba (2009) many families especially, the low income households may not always afford high cost foods at the off - season period. Akpan in Okeke and Nwankwo (2009) that there are moments, where the family drink

water to stop feeling hungry, stay in bed all day because there is nothing more to eat. Also mothers eat nothing for days so that children can have something to eat. If they cook, as they learned to with basic foodstuffs – yam, cassava, cocoyam, rice among others, they are under constant threats of shortages of kerosene or gas or firewood. Therefore there is need to plan the feeding allowance to ensure buying and utilizing food necessary for sustenance. United State Programme on AID (USAID, 2002) noted that food may be physically available but inaccessibility due to financial lack, put people at risk for under nutrition even when there is adequate foods supply.

Several belief and taboos concerning feeding such as not giving children certain foods like eggs and liver to prevent children from stealing, and pregnant women not eating games (bush meat) and snails hamper healthy meal management practices (Syed and Strivasta, 2012). Interestingly, due to high cost of protein, Researchers in the field of nutrition and catering are sourcing for alternative protein in insects/bugs/maggots (Maguire, 2013). All over the world these proteinous foods are eaten, but preferences differ.

According to Anozie (2009) the traditional foods when used in diversified diets can provide daily needs for energy and protein. These traditional foods such cereals and legumes contribute considerable amounts of micronutrients to diets.

She advocated using leafy vegetables with crayfish to prepare sauces for carbohydrate staples meals. Lilly (2004) advised that homemakers should make shopping list of what is needed and buy only non-perishable foods in bulk. She also advocated that fresh food items or perishable foods should be purchased early in morning.

The effects of poor meal management practices are enormous. Birch (2013) noted that consequences of anaemia include learning disorder in children and low work output in adults and of course high level of morbidity and mortality. World Health Organization (WHO, 2014) classified Nigeria among thirty four countries in the world with the problem of xerophthalmia, a nutritional blindness disorder due to Vitamin A which is common in green, red, and yellow fruits and vegetables. UN in Anozie (2009a) agrees with the above by noting that over 50 million children are affected by Vitamin A deficiency particularly xerophthalmia with a 60% fatality rate. According to Anozie (2009b) despite strides made in reducing global hunger, there remains formidable health challenges such as obesity, nutrient deficiencies or dietary lack of essential non-nutrients called phyto-chemicals found in legumes, fruits and vegetables.

Meal management practice is an essential component of family living, yet food insecurity is common in most household, due to low wages/salaries, escalating food prices, unaffordability of flesh protein and other challenges of family life. This constitutes a problem,

hence the need to investigate meal management practices adopted by home makers in Port Harcourt.

**Purpose of the Study**

The study focused meal management practices of homemakers in Port Harcourt. Specifically, the study determined:

1. factors influencing meal management practices of home makers;
2. problems which the home makers encounter in meal management;
3. ways of solving the problems and improving meal management practices.

**Research Questions**

1. What are the factors influencing meal management of homemakers?
2. What are the problems homemakers' encounters in meal preparation?
3. What are the ways of solving the problem and to improve meal management practices?

**Methodology**

*Design and area of the study:* - Survey research design was used for the study. The area of the study is Port Harcourt of Rivers State, Nigeria.

*Population of the study:* - The population consisted of all literate

home makers in households in Port Harcourt. In Port Harcourt main town, there are over 1,500 residential buildings as derived from Port Harcourt City Council records, and each at least has a homemaker who plans the family meal.

*Sample of the study:* - Two hundred (200) homemakers were purposively sampled from estimated 1,500 households from four streets. It was purposive because only those seen physically and agreed to participate were given the instrument.

*Instrument for data collection:* - A 4-point structured questionnaire based on Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree was developed for data collection.

*Data collection and analysis techniques:* - Two hundred copies of the questionnaire were administered. The researchers were assisted by two assistants in the administration and retrieval of the questionnaire forms. The collection recorded hundred percent return. Data collected were analyzed by descriptive statistic of mean. Responses above 2.5 were considered relevant.

**Results**

*Research question 1:* - What are the factors influencing meal management practices of home makers?

**Table 1: Responses on factors influencing meal management practices**

S/N	Factors influencing meal management	$\bar{X}$	Decision
1.	Money/finance related factor	2.6	Agree
2.	Staple food availability/accessibility factor	2.9	Agree
3.	Poor power supply affects storage of perishable foods	2.7	Agree

4. Cost of protein foods	3.4	Agree
5. Family size	2.5	Agree
6. Family food preferences	3.0	Agree
7. Beliefs impeding children nutritious meals	2.8	Agree
8. Skills of homemaker	2.8	Agree
9. Adequate facilities	3.2	Agree
10. Health issues of family members	2.6	Agree
11. Occupation of family members	2.4	Agree
12. Nearness to market	2.7	Agree

Table 1 shows that except in occupation, all the respondents agreed to the items on factors influencing meal management practice in the table. This implies that financial, availability of staple foods, poor power supply, costliness of protein foods, large family size, food preference, wrong beliefs impeding

children meals, skills of homemakers, facilities, health of family members and nearness of market are influencing factors in meal management practice.

**Research question 2:** - What are the problems homemakers' encounters in meal management?

**Table 2: - Problems homemakers' encounters in meal management**

S/N	Problems of homemakers	X	Decision
1.	Unavailability/inaccessibility of staple food	2.7	Agree
2.	Poor cooking method/skill	2.4	Disagree
3.	Children liking only convenient foods	3.0	Agree
4.	Lack of nutritional knowledge and skill	2.6	Agree
5.	Special nutritional needs for invalids	2.6	Agree
6.	High cost of protein foods	2.9	Agree
7.	High cost of cooking fuel	2.7	Agree
8.	Inadequacy of feeding allowances	3.1	Agree
9.	Poor shopping list practice	2.8	Agree
10.	Poor preservation skill	3.0	Agree
11.	Lack of freezer/refrigerators	2.9	Agree
12.	High spoilage rate of perishable food	3.4	Agree

Table 2 shows that, except item 2, the respondents agreed to all other items on problems meal managers' encounter, as the mean calculations are above 2.5. This indicated that,

homemakers encounter problems in course of managing family meals.

**Research question 3:** - What are the ways to improve meal management practices by homemakers?

**Table 3: - Responses on ways of improving meal management practice**

S/N	Influencing factors	X	Decision
1	Knowledge and skill update	2.7	Agree
2	Food wastage/impulse buying should be minimize	3.0	Agree
3	Two normal meals and a light one should be served daily	3.1	Agree
4	The meals should have all nutrients adequately	2.9	Agree
5	Fruits & vegetables in season should be used	3.0	Agree
6	Children should be given more meat/fish/milk	2.6	Agree
7	Crayfish/prawns/lobsters should be used generously in meals	3.0	Agree
8	Buy in bulk with others and share	2.4	Disagree
9	Use proteins like cowpea, locust bean and soya	3.4	Agree
10	Encourage home gardening	2.2	Disagree
11	Government should ensure steady power supply	3.1	Agree
12	Embrace snail and fish farming if need be	1.8	Disagree

Table 4 shows that the mean responses on ways of improving meal management items have less than 2.5 in items 8, 10 and 12, but the rest items have more than 2.5. The implication is that homemakers' agreements to these factors indicate they are relevant in improving family meal management practice.

#### **Discussion of Findings**

The study set out to investigate meal management practices by homemakers. It was found that the respondents agreed the factors of finance, unavailability of staple foods, poor power supply, costliness of protein foods, large family size, food preference, wrong beliefs impeding children meals, skills of homemakers, facilities, health of family members, and nearness of market influence meal management practice. This agrees with USAID (2002) that food inaccessibility may be due to financial lack: poor power supply, large family

size affecting feeding practice; and costly nature of protein foods. According to Igba (2009) many family may not always afford high cost of food during off-season. The respondents also agreed on difficulty of managing balance meals for severely sick people; and belief of not spoiling children making adults to eat best parts of meals. This is in agreement with Syed and Strivasta (2012) who noted that children are deprived certain foods like eggs and liver. Lack of nutritional knowledge was also agreed on.

Concerning problems homemakers' encounters, the respondents agreed to unavailability/inaccessibility of staple food, which supports USAID (2002) report that food may be physically available but inaccessibility due to financial lack, put people at risk for under nutrition even when there is adequate foods supply; as well as agreement on lack of nutritional knowledge and skill,

special nutritional needs for invalids, and high cost of protein foods. This is in agreement with Igbemi and Lilly (2011) who commented that staple food items like rice, yam flour, beans and even garri were sold at prices that were clearly beyond the reach of most Nigerians. Also Igba (2009) stated that many families or households may not afford high cost foods at the off – season period. The respondents also agreed to high cost of cooking fuel. This agrees to Akpan in Okeke and Nwankwo (2009) assertion that homemakers are under constant threats of shortages of kerosene or gas or firewood. Other problems agreed by the respondents are inadequacy of feeding allowances, poor shopping list practice, poor preservation skill, lack of freezer/ refrigerators, and high spoilage rate of perishable food. Therefore there is need to plan the food money to ensure buying and utilizing food necessary for sustenance (WebMD, 2012).

The result has shown that respondents agreed on ways to improve meal management practices: such as nutritional knowledge update, minimizing wastage, adequate nutrients and meal serving, children should be given protein rich meals, crayfish enriched one-pot dishes; which is very possible if homemakers jettison out-dated beliefs about children feeding ( Syed and Strivasta, 2012). Anozie (2009a) opined that there remains a formidable health challenge as result of several beliefs and taboos concerning feeding. The respondents also agreed to ensure the

use of seasonal fruits and vegetables. This finding agrees with Anyakoha (2007) who noted that when foods are in season, the foods are cheaper, fresher and tastier. The respondents also agreed to bulk buying, snail and fish farming, and the government ensuring adequate power supply.

### **Conclusion**

Meal management practices are carried out in all families, but the extent of meeting nutritional needs of family members differ. Food may be available but poor choices and or financial challenge may frustrate the goal of nutritional wellness of family members. If homemakers' earnest available food resources by making shopping list, buy foodstuffs at the right time and place (considering storage facilities), cook and serve nutritious meals, and ensure the use of seasonal fruits and vegetables; most nutritional related problems will be minimized. This is the essence of proper meal management practice.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- Nutrition education should be re-visited at the family and community levels by nutritionists and Home Economists. There is need for extension service by these professionals.
- Homemakers should update their nutritional knowledge by use of nutritional

books/publication/internet to get emerging nutritional facts which will help them improve on old recipes and even develop new ones.

- Children should be given more protein rich meals, especially their lunch packs.
- Seafood like prawns, lobster and crayfish abound in Port Harcourt, so homemakers should use them abundantly in meals like bean stew, yam pottage and plantain pottage, and fresh ones in rice dishes.
- Home makers should improve on the use of protective foods like fruits and vegetables as raw as possible to help boost the immune system of HIV, Tuberculosis, and other chronic illnesses.
- Government should deliver the dividend of democracy by boosting agriculture in the country, and prevail on stakeholders of power supply to improve their services.

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