

Promoting Family Planning among Nigerian Families through Effective Use of Information Services

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Abstract

This paper examined how family planning can be promoted through effective use of information services. It described the present state of family planning in Nigeria and determines ways information services can facilitate family planning in Nigeria. It also examines possible obstacles and recommends strategies for promoting family planning among Nigerian families through effective use of information services like the use of extension and mobile library services.

Key Words: Family, Planning, Information, Services, Library.

Introduction

Family planning is the process of controlling the number and spacing of children couples reproduce (Anyakoha and Eluwa, 2010). It also enables them to decide when they will have a child. Family planning has been found to be quite beneficial to various groups of people. Such beneficiaries include women, children, entire families, the government, the society at large and even the unborn child. Family planning has been found to be

beneficial to the health of the mother and of the child, as well as the well being of the family and the overall national development of the country. Thus, Hatcher (2003) noted that family planning helps every one. Family planning helps women protect themselves from unwanted pregnancies. Agema and Adi (2006) reported that family planning have helped women around the world to avoid 400 million unwanted pregnancies. Consequently, many women's lives have been saved from

high risk pregnancies or unsafe abortions. There is no doubt frequent pregnancies drain the resources of the family and in particular the woman and directly or indirectly affect the health of children. In some cases, it has been linked to the high rate of maternal and infant mortality and invariably affects the morbidity rate of this country (Oladokun, 2004).

Family planning also saves the lives of children through child spacing. Between 13 and 15 million children under age 5, according to Agema and Adi (2006) die each year. The asserted that if all children were born two years apart, 3 to 4 million of these deaths would be avoided. Family planning also help to improve the general well being of the family as couples with fewer children are better able to provide them with enough financial, physiological, psychological and social needs. Many family planning methods also have other health benefits too such as protection from sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and human immunodeficiency virus/ acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) transmissions.

Families where children are well spaced and trained would boast of brighter future and higher socio-economic placement for the children. From here, the family line would be liberated from the poverty circle. In view of the importance of family

planning the Federal Government of Nigeria in collaboration with different international organizations such as the UNO, UNICEF, UNDP, and WHO, among others, are taking various steps to enlighten the Nigerian communities about the importance of family planning. For instance, it helps women and spouses to space their children and have few children that can be trained and catered for rather than having many children not catered for, that will eventually become menace to the society (UNICEF, 2009). However, while this is the case in the urban areas, the reverse appears to be the case in the rural communities.

In spite of the merits, family planning practices have been replete with woes and failures because of inadequacy of or inadequate access to information services by parents who are directly involved in family planning (Ayanyemi, 2006). Proper and accurate information is essential for facilitating family planning. How effective use of information services can promote family planning in Nigeria is the focus of this paper. It deals with

- the present state of family planning in Nigeria;
- relationship between family planning and information services;

- ways information services can facilitate family planning in Nigeria;
- possible obstacles to the use of information services to facilitate family planning, and
- ways of eliminating the obstacles

Present state of family planning in Nigeria

Family planning has become a common subject of many public lectures, seminars, conferences, etc. in Nigeria (Ayeni, 2001). This common trend is a response to the prevailing socio-economic and psychological factors that affect both parents and children. Community-based distribution of contraceptive has a firm footing in many states in Nigeria. Some parents, are consequently compelled (by circumstance of hardship rather than by its merit) to adopt family planning measures (Ladipo, 2009).

The adoption of family planning is at the discretion of married couples most of whom do not know what it entails. The Planned Parenthood Federation of Nigeria (PPFN), other governmental and non-governmental organizations such as the United Nations Organisation (UNO), United Nations International Children's Educational Foundation (UNICEF) etc. have however, been educating the people on the

importance and methods of family planning and encouraging Nigerians to have smaller family size. In spite of this effort, Nigeria is still maintaining high birth rate and only few couples limit the size of their families (Oladokun, 2004).

Not much of family planning information and enlightenment has permeated the illiterate family setting where great importance is still attached to having as many children as possible. Many semi-literate individuals still hold tenaciously to having many children especially where the children are females and they want males. The population growth rate of Nigeria, according to Oladokun (2004) has continued to increase as men and women have not yielded to the call to give birth to a number of children they can care for.

The level of awareness of a range of contraceptive methods provides a rough measure of the availability of family planning information in the country. Agema and Adi (2006) reported that Nigerian people could enjoy high exposure to family planning information, education, and messages on radio and television, especially, on its need and the danger of having many children. There seems to be less emphasis on child spacing. The mass media have therefore, played active role in the area of enlightenment on family planning. However, their effort has

been constrained by poor access to the media such as the radios, televisions, and newspapers. Not many Nigerians can afford the cost of the print media (newspapers, magazines, etc.) while the epileptic power situation has made access to the electronic media highly frustrating. As a result, women of reproductive age can name only an average of less than two contraceptive methods (Ladipo, 2009). It therefore, becomes necessary to utilize information services in the promotion of family planning.

Ways information services can promote family planning in Nigeria

Effective use of Information services can promote family planning in Nigeria in various ways including the following:

Information as power: To help people have access to information and make the right choices, information services constitute a tool to people's right to information about personal health and their ability to make family planning decisions for themselves (Ayanyemi, 2006). Such services can point to the range of contraceptive methods and tell where and how to find family planning information and services.

Through these services, libraries provide or disseminate information on family planning to seekers of such information. Other target audience

who may not be able to access the library directly due to such handicaps like distance and physical disabilities are enabled to access the services through extension services, exhibitions, and translation services (Salako, 2008).

Equal access to information:

Information services encourage and engender equal access to information. Access to the electronic and print media has been hindered significantly by cost and poor electricity supply. Information services, especially as provided by public libraries are generally provided free to the members of the public (Agema and Adi, 2006). Disparity in income and of standard of living between rural and urban sectors, and between the rich and the poor should not affect access to effective information service.

Provision of up-to-date and relevant information:

Men and women require adequate access to a wide array of information resources available in various formats and media (Jimba and Yakubu, 2006) on the what, why and how (nature, essence and methods) of family planning.

Access to global best practices:

Public libraries have over the years adopted the practice of international comparative studies in their service delivery (Okoli, 2005). This is the practice of securing information on what is being done in other

countries, including their family planning practices. Rural public libraries have the capacity to disseminate such vital studies and their comparative analysis to parents and parents-to-be to promote globally acceptable family planning practices in Nigeria.

Provision of and accessibility to relevant and appropriate information services: Agema and Adi (2006) indicated that decision about child bearing and contraceptive use are most likely to meet a person's needs when the individual's desire and values are based on accurate, relevant and medically appropriate information. Information services in this context involve knowing about family planning and having access to adequate information on the methods and practice of family planning. Information about family planning is pertinent for the participation in family planning. Accessibility of such information enhances positive family planning. For instance, wide access to knowledge of as many contraceptives as possible is a key to helping people make informed family planning choices. People who have access to information before choice of family planning are likely to make better decisions.

Possible obstacles to the use of information services to promote family planning

There are different obstacles to the use of information services in the promotion of family planning through information services. These include:

Poor funding of information services: Information services in Nigeria are generally poorly funded. As Zorooster (2000) noted, without proper funding, no major activity can be embarked upon and actualized in information service.

Language barrier: There is the problem of finding adequate supplies of material in the languages and at the level of difficulty that the local readers can use. This is important considering the fact that in Nigeria, for instance, there are over 300 languages spoken, with a preponderance of them at the grassroots areas (Mole and Ezeji, 2008) which has a high non English speaking population. The cost of producing reading materials in the various native languages is very high.

Neglect of information services: There is a persistent neglect of information services in particular and general library services in general in Nigeria by both parents and governments. This has been made worse by the poor knowledge

base in the use of the ICTs, and library-based information services

Poor collection of information resources: Despite their potentials in facilitating information services in the rural communities, it has been observed that there is poor provision or near lack of information and information resources and services in the rural areas, a situation Ochai, (1995) noted has prevented many public libraries from meeting their objectives. Many public libraries in Nigeria do not have adequate and current information collection and relevant information resources and services to satisfy the information needs of the teeming heterogeneous users. This, according to Dike and Amaechi (2008) puts the libraries in deep constraint with regards to the provision of specialized information services to address the family planning information needs of the people.

Poor physical access: Most library-based and non library-based information services are not readily accessible in the rural areas. Many parents lack physical access to the vital information resources and sources on family planning.

Poor infrastructural support: Most parts of Nigeria have poor or no access to online services such as the internet and are therefore constrained to rely on the print sources which are usually inadequate and outdated

(Umezulike, 2006). The Internet facilities and other access facilities are scarcely located and not readily available in Nigeria. UNECA (1992) equally observed that there is inadequacy or low level of internet connectivity and facilities in public libraries in Nigeria. This tends to cut them off from the rest of the world. The above has been made worse by the frequent breakdown of facilities, inadequate or epileptic power supply resulting in poor access to even television programmes.

Ways of eliminating the obstacles

These include, among others:

- There should be increased enlightenment campaign on the essence and methods of family planning through information services. Such campaign should be carried out by libraries,(especially, public, national and academic), in conjunction with relevant bodies.
- Public libraries should market library services to bring relevant information to the door step of potential users of information on family planning even when they are not willing to come to the library. The modus operandi is through the use of a network of rural public libraries springing from the headquarters (centralized). It may also include the use of any of the services available to the library.

- Rural public libraries should see the need for multi-media services in the provision of information services to promote family planning. To benefit from library information services, a new conceptualization to the design and service delivery is imperative. Libraries in Nigeria should therefore avail their users the opportunity of information provision in variety of sources, media and format. When this is realized as special responsibilities, the following are the focus, according to Okoli (2005).
- Identification of family planning information needs of stakeholders such as extension workers, policy makers, health practitioners, family planning researchers and the entire citizenry.
- Capacity building for stakeholders in family planning through training workshops, book talks, discussion groups and seminars on various family planning themes.
- Production of information enlightenment and media such as posters, photographs, audio-visuals, pamphlets etc to educate, inform and enlighten citizenry on helpful family planning practices and innovations.
- Additionally, public libraries have over the years adopted the practice of international comparative studies in their service delivery.

This is the practice of securing information on what is being done in other countries, including their health system. This is a very important ingredient of family planning among the citizenry

Conclusion

Accessibility of information and choice enhances family planning. Widespread access to as many contraceptive methods as possible is a key to helping people make informed family planning choices. Information can empower rural dwellers to participate in family planning decision making, exchange ideas with others in developed and developing countries and improve the quality of life of the people. Information serves as the engine house and moving force behind effective family planning but such information must be relevant and adequately provided to be able to achieve the desired objective.

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