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HEALTH INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOUR AND NEEDS OF WOMEN LIBRARIANS IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

A woman's health challenges and needs are unique and diverse especially in physical, social and psychological contexts. The purpose of this study is to explore the activities of women librarians concerning their health information needs. This study examined the health information needs and information seeking behaviour of women librarians in Rivers State. The population consisted of all women librarians in Rivers State who are in the whatsapp group chat. Google forms online questionnaire was used as the instrument for gathering data. 40 women filled and submitted the questionnaire, and were used for the study. The findings of the study revealed that the women used different sources to satisfy their information needs, the highest number of respondents (80%) needed information on general body fitness. Also, the major source consulted (85%) in seeking information is the internet. Findings also show that the highest number of respondents (85%) agreed that the information sought helped them achieve stress and anxiety control. High cost of information sources was also identified as the main barrier in seeking health information. Among conclusions and recommendations made based on the findings are the need to source for useful information and consult credible sources of information to avoid false information that can complicate health issues.

Keywords: *Information seeking behaviour, Information needs, health information, information sources.*

Introduction

Information is a vital tool in human existence, it is needed to keep oneself knowledgeable of different areas of endeavour. Information seeking behaviour about one's health is increasingly becoming important to women especially with their peculiar health needs in the midst of rising cases of life-threatening diseases and sicknesses. These peculiar health needs makes them tend to seek information in one way or the other to satisfy their information needs. Oyewo, Abatan and Salau (2019), posited that information seeking behavior is a complex activity, requiring access to diverse information resources to deal with work-related, personal, and social information problems. The authors further

explained that information seeking behavior refers to strategies for locating information, and has three elements: people, information, and systems. Access to health information is critical because it creates awareness for the people to become conscious of their health needs and proffer solutions to challenges that might be faced.

Health information seeking behaviour according to several authors entails the use of specific actions and/or strategies by individuals to acquire information. It is broadly viewed as the ways and manner by which individuals obtain information about health, illness, health promotion and risks to health. Health Information Seeking (HIS) is

increasingly being recognized as an important activity in today's information age. The set of activities one person performs to meet his or her own information needs is called information seeking behavior. Broussard and Doty (2016) opined that the essential pillar in information seeking behavior is the information need; that is, a question within the mind that manifests himself in order to find an answer. And the individual, in the process of finding the answer to this inner need, manifests itself in a behavior that is known to be information seeking. Information seeking behavior includes the purpose of information search, the search method, the search problems, and the factors that influence it. It is a vital activity toward achieving health behaviour change (Lustria, Smith and Hinnant, 2011) and it is a key coping strategy in health-promotive activities and psychosocial adjustment to illness (Lambert and Loiselle, 2007). Consequently, understanding the health information seeking behaviour (HISB) of individuals is crucial, especially in today's information abundant age. More importantly, understanding the HISB of women is essentially needed because according to Wathen and Harris (2006), women are active information seekers, particularly in the context of managing health for themselves and their families. Ability to get credible and relevant information can help women prevent complications and have more confidence in treatment and management of any health challenges.

Information need according to Kemasuode (2012) is the recognition of the existence of uncertainty in decision making. According to this concept it also refers to the extent to which information is required to solve problems.

Statement of the Problem

Health related problems are becoming very rampant in our society today especially among women. Rampant rate of sicknesses have made women resort to different ways in seeking information to satisfy their health information needs. Sources of information are also becoming explosive and this has made seeking for correct information and getting the right sources of information not so easy. It is against this backdrop that this research was carried out to investigate

what the information needs are and their different information seeking behaviour of women.

Research Objectives

In carrying out this study, the following objectives guided the study:

1. To identify the health information needs of women librarians in Rivers State.
2. To identify the information sources consulted in meeting information needs of women librarians in Rivers State.
3. To Explore what areas health information is beneficial to women librarians in Rivers State.
4. To determine the barriers to seeking information for women librarians in Rivers State

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What are the health information needs of women librarians in Rivers State?
2. What are the information sources consulted in meeting information needs of women librarians in Rivers State?
3. In what areas are health information needs beneficial to women librarians in Rivers State?
4. What are the barriers to seeking information for women librarians in Rivers State?

Literature Review

Health information needs includes a wide range of information, including information about sicknesses, how to prevent them and their initial treatment, which is one of the main concerns for many people (Bigdeli, Z., Azimi, M.H., Zare, F. 2010). Odusanya and Amusa (2003) posited that information needs can be seen as a requirement for subsistence or for carrying out some functions or activities, the authors further stated that information needs refer to information demands, requirements, wants or desires for some general and specific purposes.

Studies have also examined the types of health information women search for on the web (Fox & Duggan, 2013; Hutton et al.). the findings of this studies revealed that women search for information about specific medical conditions,

symptoms and diseases, treatment and drug, healthy lifestyles, weight loss, nutrition and diet, general body fitness, people with similar symptoms, support groups, health specialists, health services and facilities.

Women tend to try different sources of information when seeking for health information needs. In a study by Mayer, Terrin, Kreps, Menon, McCance and Parson (2007) on cancer survived information seeking behaviour of patients found out that internet was the most important source of information for them. Feizi et. al. reviewed information seeking about the carcinogenic factors and cancer warning signs. The most important sources of information about cancer were, respectively, media, personal studies, and friends. Zare, Gavani et al. (2010) studied the health information of members of public libraries in Qazvin. The most common ways to get health information were watching TV and browsing search engines.

The findings of the study by Nasrollahzadeh (2015) showed that participants in a study conducted had a positive attitude toward health information and consider the use of health information to be beneficial. They believed that health information can help them in "controlling their conditions," "adapting to their conditions," "stress and anxiety control" as well as "preforming their social roles" improving their "hopefulness." These results are similar to those reported by Leydon *et al.* (2000) regarding information-seeking behavior of cancer patients, Jenkins *et al.* (2001) and Barzabadi (1992) regarding information needs of patients undergoing chemotherapy, Mufunda, Wikby, Bjorn and Hjelm (2012) regarding diabetic patients, Mayer *et al.* (2007) and Yan (2010) regarding information-seeking behavior on the internet.

The convenience and accessibility of online support may have strong appeal to these women (White and Dorman, 2001). For most women, however, the findings revealed that Google is by far the most popular search engine. Google was described as an ease to use search engine and that it has the ability to retrieve quality results and that it is capable of bringing up the most variety of answers (Fiksdal et al, 2014).

Findings of research by Riahi, Hariri and Nooshinfard (2016) showed that lack of mastery of the use of print and internet information resources is the most important barrier to access to information. Latifi, Barahmand and Fahimnia (2017) examined the barriers to the health information of women with breast cancer after mastectomy. The findings showed that three factors including "fears," "shame," and "inadequate information literacy" were the main individual barriers. Milewski and Chen (2010) reviewed the barriers to obtaining medical information in patients with diabetes. The most important obstacles were lack of motivation, passivity, inconsistency in information, and inability to find useful information. Nasrollahzadeh (2015) studied the health information behavior of pregnant women. The most important barriers to gain information were lack of time, inability to assess material credibility, and high scientific levels of book content.

The findings of the study by Ghazavi-Khorasgani, Ashrafi-Rizi, Mokarian and Afshar (2018) showed that high cost of information sources," "lack of response from treatment personal (physicians and nurses)," and "lack or trust in website information" were the most important information-seeking barriers among the patients. These results are similar to those reported by Latifi *et al.* (2017) regarding barriers of access of women with breast cancer to health information and, the study by Milewski and Chen (2010) regarding barriers of meeting the information needs of diabetic patients. However, these results were different from those reported by Nasrollahzadeh (2015) regarding information needs of pregnant women and Riahi *et al.* (2016) regarding health information needs of immigrants. The reason for this difference can be differences in the disease type and study population.

Patients' lack of knowledge about credible and useful information sources regarding breast cancer reveals the need to making them informed in this area. Most patients are unfamiliar with credible and validated websites and media which is one of the most important reasons for not using these sources. To remove these barriers, it is necessary to evaluate printed and electronic information sources regarding breast cancer and determine credible and validated sources. The information needs of

patients should be fulfilled from various sources based on their level of skill and health literacy. Given these results, it is suggested for easy-to-understand sources of information to be accessible to patients freely or at a low cost. Since these sources of information lead to better self-care among patients, the cost of their creation and distribution is justified due to reduced cost in the health-care system. To produce and evaluate easy-to-understand sources of information, it is possible to use the knowledge and expertise of librarians and medical information experts since their familiarity with various sources of information makes them the most qualified individuals for production and evaluation of information sources. The cooperation between these librarians and medical information experts as well as experts in medicine, nursing, and paramedical experts (due to their clinical knowledge and direct contact with patients) can lead to suitable results in producing quality sources of information.

Research Methodology

The study adopted the survey research design. The population of this study consisted of all the women librarians in Rivers State. The instrument used for data collection was the google forms online survey. All the women the forum were given the opportunity to fill the form out of which 40 responded. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics including charts, tables, frequencies and percentages.

Demographic Data

Age	Number	Percentage (%)
31-40	4	10
41-50	20	50
31-40	16	40

Results

Research Question One: What are the health information needs of women librarians in Rivers State?

Table 1: Information needs of women Librarians

Item	Responses	Percentage
General body fitness	32	80
Pregnancy	12	30
Disease control	20	50

Family planning	6	15
Herbal medicine	10	25
Dieting and weight loss	24	60
Personal hygiene	26	65
Menopause	16	40

From table 1 above, the responses showed that 80% of the women librarians need information for Body Fitness; 65% of the women need information for Personal Hygiene; 50 % of the women for Disease Control; while for 40% of the women need information for Menopause; 30 % of the women need information for Pregnancy; 25% of the women need information for Herbal Medicine; 15% of the women need information for Family Planning while for 6% of the women need information for Dieting and Weight Loss.

Research Question Two: What are the information sources consulted in meeting information needs of women librarians in Rivers State?

Table 2: Information Sources Consulted

Item	Responses	Percentage
Internet	34	85
Electronic media	20	50
Traditional doctors	4	10
Library resources	26	65
Hospital and health workers	24	60
Social media	14	35
Relations and friends	16	40

On the sources consulted in meeting information needs, the responses in table 2 above shows that 85% of respondents use the internet; 65% use Library Resources; 60% use Hospital and Health Workers; 50% use Electronic Media; 40% use Relations & Friends; 35% use Social Media; 10% use Traditional Doctors.

Research Question 3: In what areas are health information needs beneficial to women librarians in Rivers State?

Table 3: Uses of Information Needs

Item	Responses	Percentage
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Stress and anxiety control	34	85
Performing social roles better	20	50
Performing family life better	20	50
Improving job performance	20	50
Family planning	8	20
Adapting to conditions	24	60
Disease control	26	65

Table 3 above shows that for 34 (85%) of the women, health information is beneficial for stress and anxiety control; for 26 (65%) of the women the information is beneficial for disease control; for 24 (60%) of the women the information is beneficial for adapting to conditions; while for 20 (50%) of the women the information is beneficial for improving job performance and performing family life better; 8 (20%) of the women use the information for family planning.

Research Question 4: What are the barriers to seeking information for women librarians in Rivers State?

Table 4: Barriers to Seeking Information

Item	Responses	Percentage
High cost of data subscription	40	65
High cost of information sources	24	60
Lack of time	18	45
Lack of trust in information sources	24	60
Ambiguity of information	30	75

According to table 4 above 40 (65%) cited high cost of data subscription as one of the barriers to information seeking, others include 24 (60%) citing high cost of information sources, 18 (45%) mentioned lack of time, 24 (60%) cited lack of trust in information sources while the majority of the respondents 30 (75%) cited ambiguity of information as the greatest barrier to information seeking. Other barriers cited include high cost of medical care, high cost of consultants time and high cost and tight schedule.

Discussion of Results

From the table 1 the responses showed that most of the women librarians needed information mainly for Body Fitness, Personal Hygiene and Disease Control; while other women needed information for Menopause and Pregnancy, the least number of responses are those that need information for Herbal Medicine and Family Planning while just a few of the women needed information for Dieting and Weight Loss.

This is line with the findings of the studies by Fox and Duggan, (2013); Huntington et al., (2003) that women search for information about: (i) specific medical conditions, (ii) symptoms and diseases, (iii) treatment and drug, (iv) healthy lifestyle, (v) weight loss, (vi) nutrition and diet, (vii) general body fitness, (viii) people with similar symptoms, (ix) support groups, (x) health specialists, and (xi) health services and facilities.

Table 2 shows most respondents used internet and library resources as their chief sources of information, this is expected as the internet is becoming increasingly very popular in sourcing for information, and that by virtue of their being librarians they had better access to information materials in their libraries. This increase can be largely due to the high frequency of online information resources as cited in studies by Latifi, Barahmand and Fahimnia (2017), Einav, Finkelson and Williams (2016) that found out that people who use the Internet in seeking for health information prefer to seeking their health information through search engines such as Google or Yahoo for their ease of use and access to up-to-date information This however differs from the study by Riahi *et al.* (2016) which found out that consultation with family, friends and relatives is one of the most important channels for obtaining health information for immigrants in Iran. Baker (2011) study showed that rural women in Malaysia mainly use mass media such as newspapers, magazines, TV and radio for their health information needs.

Table 3 above shows that for majority of the women, health information is beneficial for stress, anxiety control, disease control and for adapting to conditions; while for half of the women the information is beneficial for improving job performance and performing family life better; only a few of them use the information for family

planning. Motivation for online health information seeking Studies have investigated reasons why women look for health information on the web. The findings of these studies revealed several motivating factors for online health information including wanting to learn more about diagnosing, seeking out a second opinion to challenge other information, treating specific health condition, enhancing a clinic visit, seeking out advice and support, perceived external barriers to accessing information through traditional sources and to help someone else. (Fiksdal et al, 2014; Higgins et al, 2011; Powell et al, 2011; Bernhardt and Felter, 2004).

According to table 4 above respondents cited ambiguity of cited information as the greatest barrier to information, closely followed by: lack of trust in information sources, high cost of data subscription and high cost of information sources as the major challenges they face. Few mentioned lack of time. Other barriers cited include high cost of medical care, high cost of consultants time and high cost and tight schedule. This is in line with the studies by Ghazavi-Khorasgani, Ashrafi-Rizi, Mokarian, and Afshar (2018) which showed that high cost of information sources," "lack of response from treatment personal (physicians and nurses)," and "lack or trust in website information" were the most important information-seeking barriers among the patients.

CONCLUSION

The study has shown that most women librarians use the internet and information resources from the library to access health information to a large extent. The study also showed that women have various types of health information needs and these information needs are applied in various areas of their lives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings above, the following recommendations were made:

- (i). Information system designers should develop services and information systems that meet the health information needs of women who access health information on the internet.
- (ii). Considering the fact that more women librarians are active in their use of the internet as a source of information, and that the Internet is an effective medium for

providing support to a large number of women, institutions and organisations should reach women with information or various interventions in places where they are found on the internet.

- (iii). There is also need to conduct more studies on health information needs of women in a web-based environment.
- (iv). Data rates should be reduced to encourage people have access to data so as to obtain relevant health information.

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