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An Analysis of Youths' Responses to Media Messages Promoting Family Planning Services in Abraka Community of Delta State

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Abstract

This study evaluates the degree of awareness, misconceptions, and attitudes to media messages on family planning methods in Abraka community in Ughelli South Local Government Area of Delta State. It employed the survey method of research, using a sample of one hundred and twenty (120) respondents who were purposively chosen from different parts of Abraka community in Delta State. The research also involved an examination of secondary data to generate data and assumptions for the study. Data generated were analysed using simple percentage and presented with the aid of tables. Findings revealed that the youths in Abraka are aware of family planning, and believe that family planning should be encouraged. They also agree that the mass media do give the messages concerning family planning. Findings also reveal that the majority of the respondents are of the view that they get their family planning messages from radio, television and newspapers mainly. However, the majority of the respondents believe that Radio is the most effective source for media messages on family planning. The study therefore recommends that the mass media should focus also on enlightening the youths on the dangers of unwanted pregnancies as illiteracy is found to be a major factor which still sustains it in the community under study and that health organisations and reproductive health partners in Delta State should partner with the mass media on advocacy efforts with a view to promoting family planning more at the grassroots level.

Introduction

The current realization that socio-economic development and wellbeing of a society can be affected by astronomical increase in population has led to the establishment of family planning programmes. Family planning is a way of living that is adopted voluntarily upon the basis of knowledge attitude and responsible decision-making by individuals or couples in order to pin the number, timing and spacing of the children that they want. The idea is to promote the health and welfare of the family group, and contribute to the advancement of the society.

Well-designed mass-media campaigns have proved their efficacy of being able to increase the use of family planning approaches in Nigeria. For

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instance, Piotrow, P. T., Rumon, G. J., Winnard, K. D. L., Kincaid, Huntington, D. and Conviser, I. (1990) recorded that between 1985 and 1988, television promotion of family planning in the cities of Ilorin, Ibadan, and Enugu helped increase the numbers of new and continuing contraceptive users in the areas and that after the campaign, the number of new clients almost quintupled in Ilorin, tripled in Ibadan, and more than doubled in Enugu with about half of respondents surveyed in the study reporting to have seen the family planning messages on television.

Similar result was also recorded in Borno State after a mass-media campaign involving radio, television, print materials, as well as an advocacy forum with religious leaders was conducted. Evidently, the number of first-time users in sentinel clinics rose by 24% over pre-campaign levels, and the number of continuing users rose to 37% (Kiragu and Omotara, 1992).

A Demographic and Health Survey data from Nigeria report similar findings. The 1990 survey revealed that those who have ever used contraceptives was 8.2% higher among women who were exposed to family planning messages than among their unexposed counterparts. The gap was even greater, fully 10% points, for current use of contraceptives. As for non-users, 37% of those exposed to family planning messages said that they intended to use contraceptives, compared with only 19% of non-users who had not seen or heard the messages (Bankole *et al.*, 1993).

A similar 1989 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) in Kenya revealed that women who were exposed to mass-media messages were more likely, than their peers who had not been exposed, to use family planning and to use a modern method (Westoff and Rodriguez, 1995). The study also revealed that non-users who had been exposed to family planning messages in the mass media were more likely to report that they intended to use contraception in the future. Mass media exposure can also be associated with a desire to space or to limit pregnancies.

With over 140 million people, Nigeria is the most populous nation on the African continent. With a robust mass media that is fairly developed and widespread the mass media are the channels through which most information gets to the people on various issues. The mass media are an important vehicle for disseminating information about family planning to this large population.

In terms of vibrancy, the mass media has a chequered history of advocating for the people as well as informing them of their rights. They have also championed campaigns especially health campaigns which also include family planning. With the use of the mass media as channels for campaigns on family planning, important messages can be distributed to the people, especially in rural areas like Abraka in Ethiope West Local Government Area of Delta State. Here multiple mass media channels like radio, television, newspapers, posters, and other print materials can be applied in reaching a broad audience. Be that as it may, it can be said that radio remains the most important channel for communicating with the rural populace about family planning and there is no gainsaying the fact that future communication interventions in Nigeria will

continue to rely on radio and television to disseminate messages about family planning.

Abraka is situated in Ethiope East Local Government Area, in the Central Senatorial District of Delta State. It is a University community but largely dominated by the Urhobos. The Urhobos have strong preference for polygamy and there is a strong belief that children are blessings from God and insurance against old age. It is in this regard that this study seeks to evaluate the degree of awareness, misconceptions, and attitudes to media messages on family planning methods in Abraka community.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the following theoretical postulations. Elaboration Likelihood Model and Social Marketing Theory.

▪ Elaboration Likelihood Model

The elaboration likelihood model, asserts that there are two routes to persuasion, the central and the peripheral routes. The thesis of the central route is that an individual's motivation and ability to process information and generate favourable or unfavourable thought about an idea constitute the central route. This routes according to Yates (2003), is that attitude change results from a person's diligent consideration of information that he feels is central to the true merit of a particular position. The ELM model explains that attitude change by the central route have been found to be relatively accessible, persistent overtime predictive or behaviour and resistant to change until challenged by contrary information.

The peripheral route of persuasion holds that it is not a result of an individual's critical consideration of the merit of an issue; instead, it is the result of a person's associating the issue with positive or negative cues that results in attitudes change. Kennamer and Honnold (1995, p.324) opine that "If the people see information as relevant, solvent or useful to their own lives, they may pay attention and even if it clashes with their belief system.

The import of the model to the study lies in the fact that:

- Because family planning is an important factor in our modern days especially with the youths, most people are likely to seek ways of protecting themselves
- The fear of unwanted pregnancies and other associated risks may make partners to seek alternative ways as well as scare youths and adolescents from involving in pre-marital sex.

The Problem

According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Seven billion people will inhabit the earth on 31 October 2011. The population of the world is increasing by 90 million annually, with 90% of the increase occurring in developing societies (UNFPA, 2011 report). This has made the need for family planning more important than ever before.

In the past, the need for family planning had been rationalised by a significant number of women who stated their desire to cease childbearing. However, despite the apparent need for contraceptives, very little seems to have been achieved in aggregate fertility reduction especially in the rural areas. The lack of success of the family planning revolution may be attributed to the lack of adequate information especially to the people living in the rural areas.

Evidently, the attitudes of some males toward contraceptives and their unwillingness to use or allow their spouses to do so are another great concern in the rural communities. Some people erroneously view mass media messages as a plot by the government to reduce their chances of bearing children which they say 'will be their source of help and encouragement when they are old.' The questions agitating this study therefore are: What is the perception of youths in Abraka community towards media messages promoting family planning services? What are the various media sources on family planning available to youths in Abraka community? How does illiteracy as a factor affect the understanding of media messages on family planning by youths in Abraka community? How does the Urhobo culture affect the understanding of media messages on family planning by youths in Abraka community?

Objectives of the Study

- 1 To find out the perception of youths in Abraka community towards media messages promoting family planning services.
- 2 To find out, the media sources on family planning available to youths in Abraka community.
- 3 To ascertain how illiteracy as a factor affects the understanding of media messages on family planning by youths in Abraka community.
- 4 To assess, how the Urhobo culture affect the understanding of media messages on family planning by youths in Abraka community.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms shall be defined:

- **Family Planning:** - This is a method adopted voluntarily upon the basis of knowledge attitude and responsible decision-making by individuals or couples in order to pin the number, timing and spacing of the children that they want, so as to promote the health and welfare of the family group, and contribute to the advancement of the society.
- **Mass Media Messages:** - These are messages on family planning services which are communicated through a mass medium to a large number of people.
- **Mass Media:** - Channels of communication through which mass mediated messages get to an audience. They include Radio, Television, Newspapers, Magazines, Cinema, internet etc. They are regarded as mass media because they can reach out millions of audience at a time.
- **Youths:-** Male and female individuals, between the ages of 15 years to 35 years resident in Abraka community in Ughelli North Local Government Area of Delta State, South- South Nigeria as at the time of this study.

Methodology

This study adopted the survey method of research. The Population of this study consisted of all youth population (male and female) in Abraka Ethiope East Local Government Area of Delta State, within the age range of 18 to 40 years. The population of Abraka in Ethiope East Local Government area of Delta State is put at 56419 people (NPC, 2006). 120 respondents were purposively selected from the population. This was arrived at by taking a less than 5% of the population size as justified in Nwana (1981) cited in Okoro (2001, p.73).

With the aid of a well-constructed questionnaire, data was collected for this study. The questionnaire contains both structured and unstructured questions. The questionnaire contained mainly closed-ended questions and designed in such a way that answers were elicited to all the objectives of the study.

The instrument was administered to the respondents on a person-to-person basis. In effect, the completed questionnaire was collected on the spot after administration. This was to ensure that the total number of questionnaire administered is the same with the number retrieved. The researcher was also present to answer all oral questions from the respondents and to give guidance on how the questionnaire should be filled.

Data Analysis

Data collected were analysed using the simple percentages analysis and are presented with the help of tables. The simple percentage analysis was adopted to enable the researcher to fully explore and explain the data collected and collated from the questionnaire without the use of complex mathematical models.

Literature Review

The mass media have prominent roles to play in socialization and behaviour change. Wilson's (1997:133) submission on the nature and influence of the mass media provides useful insights on the role of the mass media in the promotion of family planning practices. According to him:

The mass media of communication are so persuasive in their socio-cultural and political influence that there is hardly any field of human endeavor that do not have a specific role to play. They act as eyes and ears of society (i.e as watchdogs) and as mobilizers, informers, educators, entertainers and channels for disseminating information propagating culture, educating, entertaining, mobilizing, correlating the environment and promoting the general economic well-being of the society and their owners.

Graber (1989) cited by Anyanwu (2004:3) buttresses this role of the media when she said "besides calling attention to matters of potential public concern, the media also provides cues to the public about the degree of the importance of an issue. Matters covers prominently by the media on the front page, 25 with big

headlines and pictures, or as a major television or radio feature are likely to be considered most important by media audiences. Matters buried on the back pages are far less likely to be perceived as important coverage.

The communication channels that can be deployed by the mass media in the promotion of family planning include but not limited to: logos/symbols, television, radio, print, outdoor media etc. Writing on the place of television, Akpan (2007, p. 7) notes that television is capable of delivering audio-visual information nationally, because of its national reach, complexity and cost. Television is best suited for national family planning communication activities, although local activities can use the medium sporadically.

Opubor (1986:230) in Akpan (2007) postulates that “the basic goal of the media is fact-finding. That is the function of the news operations determining what is and saying that it is, saying so publicly.” This means that the media must help clear misconception and misperceptions about family planning, especially in the rural areas by providing insights into the various methods of family planning and the advantages it holds for the family and the nation with a view to safeguard the health of the citizens. This is in line with the thoughts of Manoff (1998) cited in Melone, S. Tersiz, G., and Belelo, O. (2002:5), that:

The media function of information and educating helps in securing a free flow of accurate and constructive information, counteracting misconceptions, identifying the interest underlying the issues, and helping to build a consensus.

Klapper (1960) cited in Nwuneli (1986:212) observes that media functions are believed to have effect on society; He however, contends that there is a limit to which the media functions affect attitude and behavioural change. This is because there are a lot of intervening variables which contributes to attitude change. According to him “mass communication ordinarily does not serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effects, but rather functions among and through a nexus of mediating factors and influences. These factors according to Rimon (2003, p100) occurs when;

- these mediating factors are sure that they typically render mass communication a contributing agent, but not the sole cause in a process of reinforcing the existing conditions.
- on such occasions as mass communication does function in the service of change, one of two conditions is likely to exist, either the mediating effect of the media will be found to be direct or the mediating factors, which normally favour reinforcement, will be found to be themselves impelling toward change.
- there are certain residual situations in which mass communication seems to produce direct effects or direct and of itself to serve certain psychological functions.
- the efficacy of mass communication, either as contributing agents or agents of direct effect is affected by various aspects of the media and communication.

These limitations of the mass media have led communication scholars to adopt 27 multiple - approach in reaching the desired target. "The mass media information should be reinforced with interpersonal sources that the people have developed and used over the years to ensure popular acceptance and participation" (Ochonogor, 2005, p.120).

Rimon (2003) shares this view when he contends that there should be a change of emphasis from monologue in which the mass media dish out information to the public to dialogue between people, couples, parents and children, neighbours and friends. This 'strategic communication' approach as McKee, Bertrand and Becker-Benton (2004), notes helped in the campaign for seatbelt use and lowering Serum Cholesterol in the United States of America, which can be very effective in fostering attitude and behaviour changes.

The pitfall in the mass media is even more pronounced in the rural areas where there are low levels of media literacy but a preponderance of folk media. Piotrow, et al, (1997) cited in Akpan (2007) draws on the power of the folk media. According to them, folk media are often used to supplement the mass media. The government and development agencies can make use of these popular and familiar cultural forms to put across a message. It is a very useful way of transmitting information in an accessible way, for changing attitudes and encouraging participation in a programme. Akpan (2007) adds that, in rural communities, folk media is often more convincing than the mass media because they are accessible and touch people in a more immediate and real way without mediation.

The mass media have been acknowledged to be critical in the campaign on family planning; the effectiveness of the mass media in the campaign depends largely on the designing of the message, the reach of the media, accessibility, the language used for communication and the feedback mechanism provided. However, the influence of the media in the campaign for family planning can be more potent if consideration is given to other interpersonal or in-group media where communications is inbuilt into the operations of the social groups.

Data Presentation

Table 1: Age

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage
18 – 25	47	39%
26 – 32	40	33%
33 – 40	33	28%
Total	120	100%

Table 2: Sex

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	51	43%
Female	69	57%
Total	120	100%

Table 3: Marital Status

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	41	34%
Single	62	52%
Single Parent	17	14%
Others	0	0%
Total	120	100%

Table 4: Information on family planning

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	120	100%
No	0	0%
Undecided	0	0%
Total	120	100%

Table 5: Awareness of the meaning of family planning

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	88	73%
No	12	10%
Undecided	20	17%
Total	120	100%

Table 6: Meaning of Family Planning

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
A birth control strategy for proper family planning	65	54%
A western way of limiting population in Africa	21	18%
An economic strategy for curbing poverty	14	12%
A strategy for controlling population in Nigeria	20	17%
Total	120	100%

Table 7: Practice or knowledge of family planning

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	65	54%
No	41	34%
Undecided	14	12%
Total	120	100%

Table 8: Encouraging family planning

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	88	73%
No	0	0%
Undecided	32	27%
Total	120	100%

Table 9: Awareness of media messages promoting family planning

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	103	86%
No	3z	3%
Undecided	14	12%
Total	120	100%

Table 10: Media Channels for propagating family planning messages

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Radio	49	48%
Television	35	29%
Newspaper	19	16%
Total	103	100%

Table 11: Media Channel Effectiveness

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Radio	51	50%
Television	26	25%
Newspaper	9	9%
Total	103	100%

Table 12: Forms for packaging media messages on family planning

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Educational Programmes/articles	32	27%
News stories	27	23%
Music	41	34%
Drama	12	10%
Features/documentaries	9	8%
Others	0	0%
Total	120	100%

Table 13: Targets of Family planning messages

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	39	33%
No	51	43%
Undecided	30	25%
Total	120	100%

Table 14: Effectiveness of media messages promoting family planning

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	59	49%
No	35	29%
Undecided	26	22%
Total	120	100%

Table 15: family planning messages and the encouragement of promiscuity

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	26	22%
No	67	56%
Undecided	27	23%
Total	120	100%

Table 16: Presence of problems militating against the understanding and acceptance of family planning messages

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	88	73%
No	19	16%
Undecided	13	11%
Total	120	100%

Table 17: Illiteracy as a problem to the understanding of media messages on family planning

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	88	100%
No	0	0%
Undecided	0	0%
Total	88	100%

Table 18: Teenage and unwanted pregnancies and the lack of understanding and acceptance of family planning messages

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	88	73%
No	21	18%
Undecided	11	9%
Total	120	100%

Table 19: Culture and family planning

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	44	37%
No	51	43%
Undecided	25	21%
Total	120	100%

Table 20: Culture, youths and family planning practices

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	81	68%
No	22	18%
Undecided	17	14%
Total	120	100%

Data Analysis

Data from the study reveals that all the respondents agree that they have heard about family planning before. Findings also indicate that the majority of the respondents (88 or 73%) are aware of what family planning is. Twelve respondents indicated that they do not know what family planning means while the remaining 20 respondents, representing 17% are undecided.

Sixty-five (65) respondents 54% according to data in Table 7 agree that they practice or know of someone who practices family planning. Forty-one (41) respondents, representing 34% however noted that they do not practice nor know anyone who practices family planning. The remaining 14 respondents or 12% are undecided on the issue.

Table 8 reveals that eighty-eight (88) respondents, representing 73% of the respondents believe that family planning should be encouraged. The remaining thirty-two (32) respondents or 27% however are undecided on whether to encourage family planning in the area.

One hundred and three (103) respondents, representing 86% of the total respondents as indicated in Table 9 agree that they have watched, listened or read messages in the mass media promoting family planning. Three (3) respondents or 3% disagree that they have not while the remaining 14 respondents or 12% are undecided.

Table 10 deals with the media channel through which the respondents receive family planning messages. Data from the Table reveals that the majority of the respondents are of the view that they get their family planning messages from radio, thirty-five (35) respondents representing 29% indicated that they receive their messages from television while the remaining 19 respondents or 16% agree that they receive their messages through newspapers.

Data from Table 11 indicate that the majority of the respondents believe that Radio is the most effective source for media messages on family planning. Twenty-six (26) respondents or 25% agree that television is their most effective media source for messages on family planning while the remaining 9 respondents noted that newspapers are their most effective source.

On the packaging of media messages on family planning, the majority of the respondents, (41 or 34%) indicated that they are mostly packaged in the form of music. Thirty-two respondents or 27% believe that the messages are mostly packaged in the form of educational programmes/articles. News stories were the choice of twenty-seven respondents, representing 23% of the respondents while twelve respondents indicated that media messages are mostly packaged in the

form of dramas. The remaining nine (9) respondents or 8% note that the messages are mostly packaged in the form of features and documentaries.

On media messages targeting youths alone, the data from Table 13 indicates that the majority of the respondents (51 or 43%) do not agree that media messages on family planning are targeted at youths alone. Thirty-nine (39) respondents, representing 39% of the respondents however noted that family planning messages are specifically targeted at youth while the remaining 30 respondents or 25% are undecided on the issue.

Fifty-nine (59) respondents as indicated in Table 14 are of the view that mass media message on family planning is effective in their community. Thirty-five respondents or 29% say that media messages on family planning in their area are not effective in their community. The remaining twenty-six (26) respondents or 22% are undecided on the issue.

Data from table 15 indicates that the majority of the respondents (67 or 56%) disagree that media messages promoting family planning will not promote promiscuity among the youths in their community. However, twenty-six (26) respondents representing 22% of the respondents agree that media messages promoting family planning may promote promiscuity in their community while the remaining twenty-seven (27) respondents or 23% are undecided.

Responses from the majority of the respondents (88 or 73%) as shown in Table 16 indicate that there are problems militating against the understanding and acceptance of family planning messages by the media in their community. Nineteen respondents indicated that there are no problems militating against the understanding and acceptance of family planning messages by the mass media in their community while the remaining 13 respondents or 11% are undecided.

All the respondents agreed that there are problems militating against the understanding and acceptance of media messages on family planning in their community (88 or 73%) of the total respondents however agreed that illiteracy is a problem that is militating against the understanding and acceptance of mass media messages promoting family planning in their community.

The majority of the respondents as indicated by Table 18 are of the view that unwanted pregnancies by youths in their area is as a result of the lack of understanding and acceptance of family planning methods propagated by the mass media. Twenty-one respondents representing 18% disagree on the view that teenage and unwanted pregnancies by youths in their community can be attributed to the lack of understanding and acceptance of family planning messages by the mass media. The remaining eleven (11) respondents representing 9% of the respondents are undecided on this issue.

Forty-four (44) respondents or 37% as indicated by the responses in Table 19 agree that their culture discourages family planning. However, fifty-one (51) respondents or 43% of the respondents disagree that their culture discourages family planning while the remaining twenty-five (25) respondents or 21% are undecided.

Data from Table 20 indicates that the majority of the respondents (81 or 68%) agree their culture allows them to discuss family planning practices in their community. Twenty-two (22) respondents, representing 18% of the respondents

disagree that their culture does not permit them to discuss family planning issues while the remaining 17 respondents or 14% are undecided.

Conclusion

There is no gainsaying the fact that population is a major concern to the world today, especially when considered against the background of the various challenges facing people today. The need to have a manageable population that can be catered for without must problem is the reason behind the idea of family planning. Nigeria is one of the countries in the world with high population and numerous economic associated economic problems. One notable partner propagating family planning in Nigeria are the mass media. This is why this study was embarked to find out the perception of youths who are most affected by both family and economic issues on what they feel about mass media messages concerning family planning.

Findings revealed that the youths in Abraka are aware of family planning, and believe that family planning should be encouraged. They also agree that the mass media do give the messages concerning family planning. Findings also revealed that the majority of the respondents are of the view that they get their family planning messages from radio, television and newspapers mainly. However, the majority of the respondents believe that Radio is the most effective source for media messages on family planning.

It was also found that mass media message on family planning is effective in their community and respondents disagreed that media messages promoting family planning will promote promiscuity among the youths in their community. The major problem militating against the understanding and acceptance of media messages on family planning is illiteracy. Unwanted pregnancies by youths in their area are as a result of the lack of understanding and acceptance of family planning methods propagated by the mass media.

However, the study found that Urhobo culture does not discourage family planning and the culture allows youths to discuss family planning practices in their community.

Given the above and the collection of statistics and data gathered and analysed on the perception of youths in Abraka towards mass media messages promoting family planning, the following recommendations are evident utilities that should be shared for the good of society.

1. The mass media should also concentrate on education the youths on what family planning really means as the study found that there are still misconceptions on what family planning really means.
2. The mass media should focus also on enlightening the youths on the dangers of unwanted pregnancies as illiteracy is found to be a major factor which still sustains it in the community under study.
3. Health organisations and reproductive health partners in Delta State should partner with the mass media on advocacy efforts with a view to promoting family planning more at the grassroots level.

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