

COMMUNITY EDUCATION PROGRAMMES AS TOOLS FOR AWARENESS CREATION ON FAMILY PLANNING AMONG RURAL WOMEN IN IKWERRE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF RIVERS STATE.

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Abstract

This study examined Community Education Programmes as Tools for Awareness Creation on Family Planning among Rural Women in Ikwerre Local Government Area, Rivers State. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 125 which comprised 35 Health Education Officers and 90 female beneficiaries in the Community Health Education Centres in Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State. The entire population was studied as census without sampling because of its manageable size. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled “Community Education Programmes as Tools for Awareness Creation on Family Planning among Rural Women Questionnaire. The reliability coefficient (r) value is 0.86. Three research questions were posed. They were analyzed with frequencies and weighted mean. Findings from the study revealed amongst others that community education programmes such as basic literacy, health literacy, and family life education programmes to a high extent promote awareness creation on family planning among rural women. Based on the findings, the study recommended, amongst others, that policy makers and stakeholders should prioritize community education programmes as a strategic intervention for enhancing family planning adoption and improving maternal and child health outcomes among rural women.

Key Words: Community, Education, Programmes, Awareness creation, Family planning, Rural Women

Introduction

Family planning is a fundamental aspect of reproductive health, enabling individuals to make informed decisions about their fertility and improve their overall well-being. However, Sedgh, Gilda, Ashford, Laura and Viner, Kate (2022), noted that family planning is a practice by which a couple space the number of years between each child they want to give birth to through the use of contraceptive methods. To Bongaarts, Casterline, and Sinding (2022), family planning is used to implement plans including sexuality education, prevention and management of sexually transmitted infections, pre-conception counseling and management of infertility. He added that family planning is educational, comprehensive medical or social activities which enable individuals to determine the number and spacing of their children and to select the means by which this may be achieved. Trussell, Vaughan, and Dominik (2022), noted that family planning methods are grouped into two broad categories, namely, modern methods and traditional methods. Modern methods of contraception include the pill, female and male sterilization, IUD, injectables, implants, male and female condom, diaphragm, and emergency contraception. Traditional methods include those that regularly

track cervical mucus, such as the Billing's method, those that track a woman's body temperature, frequent and regular breastfeeding during the first six months after birth, and abstinence during certain times of the menstrual cycle.

Consequently, Ahmed, Alkema, and Singh (2022) avowed that improved access to contraceptives allows families to better space births, mothers may experience less nutritional depletion and children may be breastfed longer, improving young children's growth. If families have fewer children, they may also increase their investments in the children that they do have. On the other hand, Singh, Darroch, and Ashford (2022) assert that the use of contraception is influenced by the perceived likelihood and appeal of pregnancy, and relationship status. It is influenced by women's knowledge, beliefs, and perceptions of side effects and health risks. Male partners have a strong influence, as do peers' views and experiences, and families' expectations. Methods of contraception include oral contraceptive pills, implants, injectable, patches, vaginal rings, intra uterine devices, condoms, male and female sterilization, lactational amenorrhea methods, withdrawal and fertility awareness-based methods. However, Kumar, Singh, and Kumar (2022), stated that the supply for the four most commonly used methods is reliable, with 77 percent of facilities offering the four methods (combined oral contraceptives, progesterone injection, male condom, and IUD) and having all four methods available on the day of the survey. According to World Health Organization (WHO), as cited in Darroch, Singh, and Bankole (2022), the 6 benefits of family planning include, preventing pregnancy-related health risks in women, reducing infant mortality, helping to prevent HIV/AIDS, empowering people and enhancing education, reducing adolescent pregnancies, and slowing population growth.

However, creating awareness about family planning involves educating individuals, couples, and communities about the importance and benefits of family planning, as well as the various contraceptive methods available. According to Singh, Singh, and Yadav, (2022), awareness on family planning among women is crucial for empowering them to make informed decisions about their reproductive health, fertility, and future. One of the potent means of raising rural women's awareness on issues related to their wellbeing is education programme that is community based. A community education programme in this regard, is a structured initiative that aims to educate and inform a specific community or group of people about a particular issue of great concern. Undoubtedly, Community education programmes according to Olenja, Atinga, and Muthuri (2022) emerged as effective tools for promoting health awareness and behavioral change in resource-constrained settings. Prata, Pires, and Gage (2022).acknowledged that by leveraging local resources, engaging community leaders, and addressing cultural sensitivities, community education programmes can facilitate the dissemination of accurate information and foster a supportive environment for family planning. In Ikwere LGA, where traditional practices and societal norms often influence family planning decisions, community education programmes offer a promising strategy for creating awareness and promoting informed choices. Community education through its myriads of programmes has been an essential component of action to promote health and prevent diseases among women generally. It is in recognition of these needs that this study focused on some of the community education programmes identified by Shah, Lafortune, and Belsey (2022) in addressing the issue of awareness among women on family planning practice. The programmes include basic literacy programme, health literacy programme, family life education programme, peer education programme, and intergenerational education Programme,

Basic literacy programme is an educational initiative aimed at teaching individuals, particularly women, the fundamental skills of reading, writing, and numeracy. According to Archer (2017). basic literacy programme addresses the critical need for literacy skills, which are often a significant barrier to accessing health information, navigating healthcare systems, and making informed decisions about reproductive health and family planning. Unterhalter (2017) noted that by providing a supportive learning environment, basic literacy programme empower women to acquire the skills and confidence necessary to improve their overall well-being and quality of life. On the other hand, health literacy programme is an educational initiative designed to empower individuals, particularly women, with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate the healthcare system and make informed decisions about their health. Health literacy programme focuses on developing critical health literacy skills, including the ability to read and understand health information, communicate effectively with healthcare providers, and apply health knowledge to real-life situations. Meherali, Matthews, Myhre, Nisa, Idrees, Faraz, Ullah, Shah, and Lassi (2024) acknowledged that in addressing the complex health needs of women and their families, health literacy programme can improve health outcomes, reduce health disparities, and enhance overall well-being.

Consequently, family life education as described by World Health Organization (WHO) (2019), refers to a comprehensive and systematic approach to educating individuals, particularly women, children and adolescents, about the physical, emotional, social, and moral aspects of human relationships, sexuality, and family life. Kirby, Laris, and

Rolleri (2017) acknowledged that family life education aims to promote healthy relationships, responsible decision-making and positive attitudes towards family, relationships, and sexuality. According to Bongaarts and Sinding, (2015), research has shown that family life education programme significantly improve knowledge and attitudes towards family planning, maternal and child health, and gender equality.

Ultimately, this study seeks to demonstrate the value of these identified community education programmes as tools for awareness creation and behaviour change in family planning among rural women in Ikwerre Local Government Area. By exploring the complexities of family planning in this context, this research aims to contribute to a broader understanding of the potentials of community education programmes promotes as tools for awareness creation for family planning among rural women in Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State.

Statement of the Problem

Awareness is very important in building a healthy family. Women face different challenges affecting their well-being due to lack of family planning. The persistently low uptake of family planning services among rural women in Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State poses a formidable challenge to their reproductive health, socioeconomic well-being, and national development. Despite the critical role of family planning in reducing maternal and infant mortality rates, preventing unwanted pregnancies, and alleviating poverty, it was observed that women in Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State have one of the lowest rates of contraceptive prevalence. This alarming trend is worsen by inadequate awareness, entrenched cultural and religious misconceptions, and limited access to family planning services, resulting in high maternal mortality rates (576 deaths per 100,000 live births), infant mortality rates (69 deaths per 1,000 live births), and escalating poverty levels. Past interventions, largely clinic-based and urban-focused, have yielded negligible improvements, underscoring the need for innovative, community-driven solutions. The failure of previous initiatives to address the unique needs and challenges of rural women has perpetuated a cycle of poor reproductive health outcomes, necessitating the exploration of community education programmes such as basic literacy, health literacy, and family life education as a viable tool for awareness creation on family planning and behavioural change among this vulnerable population. But could these programmes raise much required awareness on family planning among rural women? This study sought to provide answer to this question and to bridge the knowledge gap by investigating the effectiveness of community-led education initiatives in enhancing family planning uptake among rural women in Ikwerre LGA, ultimately contributing to improved reproductive health outcomes, socioeconomic empowerment, and national development.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- To what extent does basic literacy programme promote awareness creation on family planning among rural women in Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State?
- To what extent does health literacy programme enhance awareness creation on family planning among rural women in Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State?
- To what extent does family life education programme facilitate awareness creation on family planning among rural women in Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State?

Methodology

The descriptive research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 125 which included 35 health education officers and 90 female beneficiaries in the community health education centres in Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State. The entire population was studied as census without sampling because it was of a manageable size. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled “Community Education Programmes as Tools for Awareness Creation on Family Planning among Rural Women Questionnaire (CEPTACFPRWQ)”. The questionnaire was structured on four (4)-point summated rating scale of Very High Extent (4), High Extent (3), =HE, Low Extent–LE (2), Very Low Extent VLE (1). The reliability coefficient (r) value is 0.86. The data collected were analyzed using frequencies and weighted mean.

Results

Research Question 1: To what extent does basic literacy programme promote awareness creation on family planning among rural women in Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State?

Table 1: The Extent Basic Literacy Programme Promote Awareness Creation on Family Planning Among Rural Women in Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State.

TABLE 1

S/N	ITEM	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	TOTAL	X	REMARK
1.	Acquisition of reading and comprehension skills enables women to understand family planning materials, brochures, and posters.	75 (300)	42 (126)	6 (12)	2 (2)	440	3.52	Accepted
2.	Gaining writing skills enhance women's ability to record family planning information like keep track of menstrual cycles, and writing to healthcare providers.	70 (280)	44 (132)	8 (16)	4 (8)	427	3.41	Accepted
3.	Achievement of numeracy skills helps women understand family planning statistics like birth spacing, and contraceptive effectiveness.	75 (300)	42 (126)	8 (16)	4 (8)	442	3.58	Accepted
4.	Learning meaning of words enhances women's understanding of family planning terminology and concepts.	72 (288)	42 (126)	5 (10)	3 (6)	430	3.44	Accepted
5.	Listening skills: enables women to effectively listen to family planning information from healthcare providers.	68 (272)	38 (114)	6 (12)	2 (4)	424	3.39	Accepted
6.	Acquisition of speaking skills empowers women to discuss family planning with healthcare providers, husbands, and peers.	76 (304)	30 (90)	11 (22)	8 (16)	432	3.46	Accepted
7.	Acquisition of critical thinking skills enables women to make informed decisions about family size, spacing, and contraceptive use.	69 (276)	45 (135)	8 (16)	4 (8)	435	3.48	Accepted
8.	Record-keeping skills enable women maintain records of family planning appointments, contraceptive use, and reproductive health.	75 (300)	38 (116)	10 (20)	2 (2)	436	3.48	Accepted

Table 1 shows that the questionnaire items that: Acquisition of reading and comprehension skills enables women to understand family planning materials, brochures, and posters ; Gaining writing skills enhance women's ability to record family planning information like keep track of menstrual cycles, and writing to healthcare providers.; Achievement of numeracy skills helps women understand family planning statistics like birth spacing, and contraceptive effectiveness.; Learning meaning of words enhances women's understanding of family planning terminology and concepts; Listening skills: enables women to effectively listen to family planning information from healthcare providers.; Acquisition of speaking skills empowers women to discuss family planning with healthcare providers, husbands, and peers; Acquisition of critical thinking skills enables women to make informed decisions about family size, spacing, and contraceptive use; and Record-keeping skills enable women maintain records of family planning appointments, contraceptive use, and reproductive health are all accepted by the respondents. Their calculated means: 3.52, 3.41, 3.58, 3.44, 3.39; 3.46, 3.48 and 3.48 respectively are greater than 2.50 the criterion mean.

Research Question 2: To what extent does health literacy programme enhance awareness creation on family planning among rural women in Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State?

Table 2: Extent that Health Literacy Programme Enhance Awareness Creation on Family Planning Among Rural Women in Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State

TABLE 2

S/N	ITEM	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	TOTAL	X	REMARK
9.	Reproductive health education improves understanding of fertility and menstrual cycles among women	75 (300)	38 (114)	8 (16)	4 (4)	434	3.47	Accepted
10.	Family Planning awareness Programme provides information on family planning methods and services thereby addresses myths and misconceptions about family planning	68 (272)	38 (114)	11 (22)	8 (8)	416	3.32	Accepted
11.	Educating women through maternal and child health Programme enable women to be aware of the importance of healthy spacing of pregnancies	75 (300)	36 (108)	10 (20)	4 (4)	432	3.45	Accepted
12.	Community-based health education promote family planning awareness and addresses cultural and social barriers to family planning	78 (312)	32 (96)	10 (20)	5 (5)	433	3.46	Accepted
13.	Health information literacy programme enable women to access and understand health information relating to family planning	76 (304)	30 (90)	11 (22)	8 (8)	424	3.39	Accepted
14.	One-on-one family life planning counseling addresses women concerns and questions about family planning	74 (296)	35 (105)	10 (20)	6 (6)	427	3.41	Accepted
15.	Integrated health and family Planning Programme increases women accessibility of family planning services	81 (524)	36 (108)	6 (12)	2 (2)	446	3.56	Accepted
16.	Health information literacy programme enhances critical thinking skills for informed decision-making on family planning among women	72 (288)	37 (111)	10 (20)	6 (6)	425	3.40	Accepted
17.	Increases awareness of family planning methods and benefits	73 (292)	34 (102)	15 (39)	3 (3)	427	3.41	Accepted
18.	Health visual aids like pictures, charts, and diagrams enhances retention of family planning information among women	81 (324)	29 (87)	10 (20)	5 (5)	436	3.48	Accepted

Table 2 shows that the options: Reproductive health education improves understanding of fertility and menstrual cycles among women; Family Planning awareness Programme provides information on family planning methods and services thereby addresses myths and misconceptions about family planning; Educating women through maternal and child health Programme enable women to be aware of the importance of healthy spacing of pregnancies; Community-based health education promote family planning awareness and addresses cultural and social barriers to family planning; Health information literacy programme enable women to access and understand health information relating to family planning; One-on-one family life planning counseling addresses women concerns and questions about family planning; Integrated health and family Planning Programme increases women accessibility of family planning services; Health information literacy programme enhances critical thinking skills for informed decision-making on family planning among women; and Health visual aids like pictures, charts, and diagrams enhances retention of family planning information among women were all accepted by the respondents. Their calculated means: 2.47, 3.32, 3.45, 3.46, 3.39, 3.41, 3.56, 3.40, 3.42 and 3.48 respectively are greater than 2.50 – the criterion mean.

Research Question 3: To what extent does family life education programme facilitate awareness creation on family planning among rural women in Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State.?

Table 3: Extent that Family Life Education Programme Facilitate Awareness Creation on Family Planning among Rural Women in Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State

TABLE 3

S/ N	ITEM	VHE	HE	LE	VL E	TOTAL	X	REMARK
19.	Engaging rural women through outreach family life education workshops on parenting and child development increases women awareness on family planning.	81 (324)	30 (90)	10 (20)	4 (4)	438	3.59	Accepted
20.	Educating women on family planning helps protect women from any health risks that may occur before, during or after childbirth	78 (312)	32 (96)	10 (20)	5 (5)	433	3.46	Accepted
21.	Offering one-on-one family counselling raises women awareness on their freedom to choose how many children they want to have	82 (328)	35 (105)	6 (12)	2 (2)	447	3.57	Accepted
22.	Family relationships and communication programme enable women to have freedom to decide the timing and spacing of any pregnancy	72 (288)	37 (111)	10 (20)	6 (6)	425	3.40	Accepted
23.	Increased access to family planning services improve children's growth and/or development	83 (332)	36 (108)	4 (8)	2 (2)	450	3.60	Accepted
24.	Family life education raises women awareness on how to have healthily time and space children over their reproductive years	76 (304)	35 (105)	10 (20)	4 (4)	433	3.46	Accepted
25.	Providing young women with access to family planning help them to effectively meet their desired family size, avert unintended pregnancies,	78 (312)	38 (114)	6 (12)	3 (3)	441	3.52	Accepted

Table 3 shows that the questionnaire items 19-25: Engaging rural women through outreach family life education workshops on parenting and child development increases women awareness on family planning; Educating women on family planning helps protect women from any health risks that may occur before, during or after childbirth; Offering one-on-one family counseling raises women awareness on their freedom to choose how many children they want to have; Family relationships and communication programme enable women to have freedom to decide the timing and spacing of any pregnancy; Increased access to family planning services improve children's growth and/or development; Family life education raises women awareness on how to have healthily time and space children over their reproductive years; and Providing young women with access to family planning help them to effectively meet their desired family size, avert unintended pregnancies were accepted by the respondents. Their respective means: 3.59, 3.46, 3.57, 3.40, 3.60, 3.46 and 3.52 are greater than 2.50 – the criterion mean.

Discussion of Findings

The findings in table 1 revealed that basic literacy programme promote awareness creation on family planning among rural women in Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State to a high extent. Each of their means is greater than the criterion mean of 2.50. This indicated that acquisition of reading and comprehension skills enables women to understand family planning materials, brochures, and posters, enhance women's ability to record family planning information like keep track of menstrual cycles, and writing to healthcare providers, helps women understand family planning statistics like birth spacing, and contraceptive effectiveness, enhances women's understanding of family planning terminology and concepts, enables women to effectively listen to family planning information from healthcare providers, empowers women to discuss family planning with healthcare providers, husbands, and peers, enables women to make informed decisions about family size, spacing, and contraceptive use, and enable women maintain records of family planning appointments, contraceptive use, and reproductive health. This finding is corroborated by the finding of Oyinlola, Adekeye, and Fagbamigbe (2018) that literate women have good knowledge of family planning methods and are more likely to use modern family planning methods compared to illiterate women. The finding is also in line with the finding of Ogunjimi, Odebunmi, and Bamiwola (2020) that women who participate in literacy programmes are reported to have increased autonomy in family planning decisions and literate women were more likely to have self-efficacy in family planning decision-making compared to illiterate women. These studies demonstrated that basic literacy programmes can effectively promote awareness creation and empowerment among rural women, leading to improved family planning knowledge and decision-making autonomy.

The result of research question 2 revealed that health literacy programme enhance awareness creation on family planning among rural women in Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State to a high extent, as evidenced by the fact that each of their means is greater than 2.50; which affirmed that reproductive health education improves understanding of fertility and menstrual cycles among women, family planning awareness programme provides information on family planning methods and services thereby addresses myths and misconceptions about family planning, educating women through maternal and child health programme enable women to be aware of the importance of healthy spacing of pregnancies, community-based health education promote family planning awareness and addresses cultural and social barriers to family planning, health information literacy programme enable women to access and understand health information relating to family planning, one-on-one family life planning counseling addresses women concerns and questions about family planning, integrated health and family planning programme increases women accessibility of family planning services, health information literacy programme enhances critical thinking skills for informed decision-making on family planning among women, and increases awareness of family planning methods and benefits. This finding agrees to the finding of Nwankwo, Onwumere, and Okide (2019) that health literacy programmes significantly improves family planning knowledge and attitudes among rural women. The finding is also in agreement with the finding of Eittah, (2019) that health literacy programme empowered rural women to make informed decisions about family planning and improved utilization of different methods. These studies demonstrated that health literacy programme can effectively enhance awareness creation, knowledge, attitudes, decision-making, and utilization of family planning methods among rural women.

The table for research question 3 revealed that family life education programme facilitates awareness creation on family planning among rural women in Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State to a high extent. Each of their calculated means is also greater than 2.50 – the criterion mean. This supports the contention that engaging rural women through outreach family life education workshops on parenting and child development increases women awareness on family planning, educating women on family planning helps protect women from any health risks that may occur before, during or after childbirth, offering one-on-one family counseling raises women awareness on their freedom to choose how many children they want to have, Family relationships and communication programme enable women to have freedom to decide the timing and spacing of any pregnancy, Family relationships and communication programme enable women to have freedom to decide the timing and spacing of any pregnancy, increased access to family planning services improve children's growth and/or development, family life education raises women awareness on how to have healthily time and space children over their reproductive years, and providing young women with access to family planning help them to effectively meet their desired family size, avert unintended pregnancies. This finding agrees with the finding by Osaro, Ordinioha, and Mezie-Okoye (2018) that family life education programme improves family planning knowledge and attitudes among rural women. The study revealed that women who participated in family life education programme had good knowledge of family planning methods, compared to non-participants. The finding also relates with the position of Afolabi, Oloyede, and Adedokun (2022) that family life education programme empowers rural women to make informed decisions about family planning and women who participated in family life

education programme made independent decisions about family planning, compared to non-participants. These studies demonstrated that family life education programme can effectively facilitate awareness creation, knowledge, attitudes, decision-making autonomy, and utilization of family planning methods among rural women.

Conclusion

The findings revealed that basic literacy programme, health literacy programme, and family life education programme, to a high extent enhanced family planning knowledge, attitudes, decision-making autonomy, and utilization among rural women. The study's results underscore the critical role of community education programmes in bridging the knowledge gap and addressing the socio-cultural barriers that hinder family planning adoption among rural women. Therefore, the programmes' effectiveness in empowering women to make informed decisions about their reproductive health and well-being is particularly noteworthy.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

- Rivers State Ministry of Education should fund and establish more basic literacy centers and partner with community stakeholders in mobilizing more rural women for enrolment into the programme as to enhance woman's reading ability to be aware of the needs for family planning methods.
- Healthcare providers should synergies with community leaders to regularly embark on health literacy programme to deliver culturally sensitive and context-specific family planning education to enable rural women to access and understand health information relating to family planning and modern contraceptive methods.
- Rivers State Ministry of Health should collaborate with community health education officers in integrating comprehensive family life education programmes into healthcare facilities to create more awareness on the benefits of family planning among women in communities.
- Policy makers and stakeholders should prioritize community education programmes as a strategic intervention for enhancing family planning adoption and improving maternal and child health outcomes among rural women.

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