**CONTRIBUTION OF MASS MEDIA TO PUBLIC HEALTH EDUCATION IN NIGERIA**

**Abstract**

The focus of the paper is on the contribution of Mass Media in Nigeria to Public Health Education in the country. Of the various forms of Mass Media, the Newspaper was selected for the study given its advantage of long period of access and wide readership. Five dimensions of health, namely, physical, social, emotional, spiritual and intellectual dimensions were considered in the study. Specific areas of these dimensions were also considered. These were Nutrition, occupational health, Maternal and Child Health (MCH), environmental health, drug education, social/emotional/mental health, family life and sex education, safety education and general health issues. Specific ailments or ill-health conditions were also given consideration. These were cancer, HIV/AIDS, coronary/cardiac diseases and hepatitis/liver diseases. Simple percentages were the statistical tool employed in the analyses. The result of the study indicates that the physical dimension of health was given greater attention in the contributions by the Newspapers under review. All the Newspapers gave adequate attention (10.5% and above) to general health issues, Maternal and Child Health, and nutrition except the Leadership Newspaper that gave 2.4% and 7.1% to nutrition and Maternal and Child Health respectively which is less than the criterion proportion of 7.7%. The Tribune and Vanguard with 10.5% and 12.8% respectively were the only newspapers that gave adequate attention to issues on cancer, while all the Newspapers reviewed gave no adequate attention to all the other areas of Public Health Education considered in the study. This paper recommended among others the reading of Newspaper for education on nutrition, Maternal and Child Health and general health issues.

**KEYWARDS**

Mass Media, Newspaper, Public Health Education

**Introduction**

In Nigeria, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1988) adopted Primary Health Care (PHC) system as the most appropriate health system for the attainment of health for all Nigerians. As noted by Ejima (2007), the attainment of six of the eight components of primary health care system is hinged on health education. Health education is thus cardinal to the attainment of the national health goals.

Some authors describe health education as a process of providing teaching/learning experiences and activity for the purpose of favourably influencing knowledge, attitudes, practices and conduct of individual and communities towards health. This view seems to focus on the teaching of health education in the formal classroom setting. Ejima (2007) gave a broader view of the concept by describing it as Public Health Education. He explained public health education as the process or art of equipping the individuals and communities with necessary information that would make them accept responsibility for their health. This view is in line with the earlier view of Butler (2001) who noted that the general goal of health education is to improve the health knowledge and attitudes of individuals aimed at promoting personal behaviours that will lead to optimal health and wellness.

A critical review of these various views on health education points to one fact, that is, provision of appropriate information on health to the individuals. It is with this in mind that this paper takes a look at the contribution of Nigerian Mass Media to Public Health Education in Nigeria.In doing this the paper takes a look at the contributions of Mass Media to the various dimensions of health and a number of specific areas of health requiring information dissemination to the public.

Lakhani (2009), Cottrell, Girvan and McKenzie (2002), Encyclopaedia of Public Health (2002), and Hielm (2010) identified five dimensions of health. These, according to them are physical, social, spiritual, emotional and intellectual health. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2001), physical dimension is the ability to maintain a healthy quality of life that allows one to get through his daily activities without undue fatigue while social dimension has to do with one’s ability to relate and connect with other people. Spiritual dimension is the ability to establish peace and harmony in one’s life. Emotional dimension on the other hand is one’s ability to understand one another and cope with daily challenges of life while intellectual dimension is one’s ability to open his mind to new ideas and experiences that can be applied to personal decisions, group interaction and community benefits.

The specific areas of health considered include those identified by Ejima (2005). These are general health issues, nutrition education, occupational health, Maternal and Child Health (MCH), environmental health, drug education, social/emotional/mental health, family life and sex education, safety education and HIV/AIDS education. Other areas considered along with these include cancer, coronary heart or cardiac disease and hepatitis or other liver infections which are considered deadly and so are of concern in Public Health Education.

According to the Encyclopaedia of Public Health (2002), Mass Media are tools for the transfer of information, concepts and ideas to both general and specific audiences. It noted that they are important tools in advancing public health goals. Kreps and Thornton (1992) noted that Mass Media extends people’s ability to communicate and to speak to others far away, to hear messages and to see images that will be unavailable without media. They perform three main functions like educating, shaping public relations and advocating for a particular policy or point of view.

Common types of Mass Media include the television, radio, internet, newspapers, magazines other print media (pamphlets, brochures and posters) and outdoor media (billboards and signs, placards, flying billboards, blimps and skywriting). For the purpose of this study however, the Nigeria Newspaper is chosen for consideration.

Though statistics on Nigeria Newspapers’ readership is not of common scene, it may approximate close to what Belch and Belch (1995) reported on the United States. They reported that an estimated population of about 70% - 90% U.S households read newspapers daily. Newspapers also have the advantage of permitting more details in reporting than other forms of mass media except for the internet. Access to internet in Nigeria is however very low due to poor level of computer literacy in the country.

**Methods and Materials**

Survey research design was employed in the study while analysis of document was the method of data collection. Five Nigeria daily Newspapers were selected for the study. These were the Daily Trust, Leadership, Punch, Tribune and Vanguard Newspapers. Health features/ articles published in each of these newspapers were browsed from the internet. The search covered a period of one year, February, 2013 - January 2014.

The analysis was in two phases. First, was on the contribution of each of the Newspapers to the five dimensions of health selected for this study namely, physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions. The second phase of the analysis was on the contribution of each of the selected Newspapers to specific areas of health identified for the study. This includes, nutrition education, occupational health, Maternal and Child Health (MCH); environmental health, cancer, drug education, social/emotional/mental health, family life and sex education, HIV/AIDs education, coronary/heart diseases, hepatitis/liver diseases; and general health issues. General health issues are issues in health that do not address specific areas of health. In this second phase of analysis, articles that address more than one specific area of health were considered. Similarly issues that are repeated were counted once.

The statistical tool employed in both sets of analysis was the simple percentage. The frequencies of articles/features addressing specific dimensions or specific areas identified for the study were taken and the percentages computed.

The criterion proportion was obtained bearing in mind the various dimensions or specific areas of health addressed in the article. For the five dimensions of health considered in this study, it would be expected that all of the dimensions are equally covered. By implication therefore, each dimension should have be given one fifth (1/5) of the total coverage of one hundred per cent. That is, 1/5 x 100/1 = 20%. The criterion proportion of the first phase of analysis is thus 20%. Any of the dimensions with 20% and above is thus adjudged to have been given adequate coverage, while those with less than 20% were considered not to have been given adequate attention. Similarly, in the second phase of the analysis which considered thirteen (13) specific areas of health, each of the areas is expected to constitute 1/13 of the proportion of coverage. That is 1/13 x 100/1 = 7.7%. The specific areas of health with 7.7% and above were therefore considered to have been given adequate coverage by the Newspaper concerned-while those with less than 7.7% were considered not to have gotten adequate attention in publicity.

**Results**

The results for this study were presented in tables.

**Table 1: Contributions of Nigeria Daily Newspapers to the Dimensions of Health.**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| The Newspaper | Physical | Dimensions Social | Of HealthEmotional | Spiritual | Intellectual | Total |
| Daily Trust | 57(75.0%) | 12(16.0%) | 5(6.7%) | - | 1(1.3%) | 75 |
| Leadership | 24(56.5%) | 11(26.8%) | 5(12.2%) | - | 1(2.4%) | 41 |
| Punch | 471(80.3%) | 81(33.8%) | 16(2.7%) | 310.5% | 15(2.6%) | 586 |
| Tribune | 17(100%) | - | - | - | - | 17 |
| Vanguard | 153(85.5%) | 22(12.3%) | 3(1.8%) | - | 1(0.6%) | 179 |

Criterion Proportion= 20%

Table 1 indicates that the Punch Newspaper published the highest number of articles (586) on health issues during the period under review. This was followed by the Vanguard (179), Daily Trust (75), Leadership (41) and then the Tribune with seventeen (17) articles.

In terms of the newspapers’ contributions to the various dimensions of health, all the newspapers had 56.5% and above of their contributions in the area of physical health and with less than 20% to all other dimensions except for the Leadership Newspaper that had a contribution of 26.8% to social health. The Tribune had all its contribution in only physical dimension.

**Table 2. Contribution of Nigeria Newspapers to Specific Areas of Health**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | **The Newspapers** |
| **S/No.** | **Specific Health Issues** | **Daily Trust**  | **Leadership** | **Punch** | **Tribune** | **Vanguard** |
| 1 | General Health Issues | 26(31.7%) | 8(19.0%)  | 131(23.6%) | 2(10.5%) | 29(14.8%) |
| 2 | Nutrition Education | 13(15.9%) | 1(2.4%) | 151(27.3% | 10(52.6%) | 64(32.7%) |
| 3 | Occupational Health  | 1(1.2%)  | 12(28.6%) | 3(0.5%)  | \_\_\_ | 1(0.5%) |
| 4 | Maternal & Child Health | 10(12.2%) | 3(7.1%)  | 91(16.4%)  | 2(10.5%) | 19(9.7%) |
| 5 | Environmental Health | 2(2.4%)  | 4(0.7%) | \_\_\_ | \_\_\_ | 1(0.5%) |
| 6 | Drug Education  | 4(4.9%)  | 3(7.1%)  | 18(3.3%) | \_\_\_ | 14(7.1%) |
| 7 | Social/Emotional Health | 8(9.8%)  | 13(31.0%) | 90(16.3%)  | \_\_\_ | 17(8.7%)  |
| 8 | Family life & sex educ | 2(2.4%)  | 1(2.4%)  | 27(4.9%)  | \_\_\_ | 13(6.6%) |
| 9 | Safety education  | \_\_\_ | \_\_\_ | 1(0.2%)  | \_\_\_ | 1(0.5%) |
| 10 | Cancer | 5(6.1%)  | \_\_\_ | 24(4.3%)  | 2(10.5%) | 25(12.8%) |
| 11 | HIV/AIDS  | 6(7.3%)  | \_\_\_ | 5(0.9%)  | \_\_\_ | 6(3.1%) |
| 12 | Coronary/Heart/Cardiac | 3(3.7%)  | \_\_\_ | 13(2.2%)  | 3(15.8%) | 6(3.1%)  |
| 13 | Hepatitis/Liver diseases | 2(2.4%) | 1(2.4%)  | 6(1.1%)  | \_\_\_ | \_\_\_ |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | **Total** | **82** | **42** | **554** | **19** | **196** |

Criterion Proportion =7.7%

Table 2 Shows that all the newspapers under consideration contributed adequately to education on general health issues with their proportion of contribution ranging betwin10.5%-31.7% which is higher than the criterion proportion of 7.7%. All the Newspapers also had adequate contribution to education on nutrition except the Leadership Newspaper with only 2.4% of its contribution devoted to nutrition. The table equally indicates fair contribution to Maternal and Child Health (MCH) issues with percentage contribution between 9.7% and 16.4% except for the Leadership Newspaper with 7.1% which is below the criterion value of 7.7%. For social/Emotional/Mental health, the table indicates adequate contribution with all the Newspapers having their percentage contributions above the criterion mean of 7.7% except for cancer to which the Tribune and Vanguard Newspapers gave 10.5% and 12.8% of their attention to, respectively. Fifteen per cent (15.8%) attention was given to coronary/heart/cardiac ailment by the Tribune Newspaper. All other areas covered in the study were not given adequate coverage in the education of the people by all the Newspapers.

**Discussion**

The Punch Newspaper had the highest contribution to Public Health Education generally, it thus follows that readers of this Newspaper stand a better chance of getting higher level of education on health.

All the Newspapers studied contributed more to the physical dimension of health than all the other four dimensions. This finding is similar to that reported by Lakhani (2009) on an evaluation of published health education research. In his report, he noted that the physical dimension of health had 79% attention in published health education research. The reason for this trend may not be too far from his postulation that it is because physical dimension of health is tangible, understandable, measurable and objective. In this study, the spiritual dimension was least covered just as in his report where the dimension received the least attention. According to him, this is so because, there are the reluctances of people venturing into the dimension as it is a politically charged area.

In terms of the contribution of the various Newspapers under consideration, the Daily Trust, Punch and Vanguard adequately covered Nutrition Education, Maternal and Child Health, Social/Emotional/Mental Health Education and general health issues. The Leadership newspaper varies a little by giving adequate attention to general health issues, occupational health education and social/emotional/mental health education though with few articles per the specific areas of health compared to those of the Daily Trust, Punch and Vanguard. These findings provide a very good guide to readers of these Newspapers as the areas of attention of each Newspaper are now highlighted. The readers thus can go for the Newspaper that best covers their areas of interest.

The areas of cancer, HIV/AIDS, Coronary Heart/Cardiac and Hepatitis/Liver diseases received little attention by all the Newspapers. This is likely not unconnected to the fact that these areas of ailment or diseases are not open to common sence and discussion on them would require expert hands who in most cases do not publish articles in newspapers but in learned or academic journals. This reason notwithstanding, considering the wide range of readership of Nigeria Newspapers, there is a need for a rethink by health experts so as to publish information in these areas in Nigeria Newspapers for the consumption of the public who may not be scientifically literate.

**Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. The major contributions of the Nigeria daily Newspapers under review are in the area of physical dimension of health.
2. Three of the Newspaper, the Daily Trust, Punch and Vanguard gave adequate coverage to issues on general health, nutrition, Maternal and Child Health (MCH), and social/emotional/mental health.
3. Cancer, HIV/AIDS, coronary/Heart/Cardiac and hepatitis/liver diseases or issues were not given adequate coverage.
4. The Punch Newspaper had the highest contribution to Public Health Education followed by the Vanguard, Leadership and Tribune Newspaper in that order.

**Recommendation**

On the basis of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. For education on a wide range of issues on health, the general public are encouraged to read the Punch and Vanguard Newspapers.
2. Individuals with special interest in general health issues, Nutrition, Maternal and Child Health (MCH) and social/emotional/mental health should read the Punch, Vanguard and Daily Trust Newspapers.
3. Feature writer and health experts are encouraged to publish issues on cancer, HIV/AIDS, Heart and Liver ailments/diseases or related issues in Nigeria Newspapers for the purpose of educating the public on health issues.
4. It is recommended that publishers of Nigeria daily Newspapers like the Tribune and leadership should give more attention to publishing health and health related issues as this would provide readers of the paper more education on health.
5. It is also recommended that health educators should carry out research in other areas of Mass Media and Public Health in Nigeria.

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