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CHALLENGES OF ACCESSING HEALTH INFORMATION SERVICES BY
PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV AND AIDS IN BENUE STATE.

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ABSTRACT

The study was on challenges of accessing health information services by PLWHA in Benue State. The survey research technique was used. The area of study was Benue State, Nigeria. The population was 16,502. Proportionate stratified sampling technique was used to draw a sample of 824 PLWHA. Questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. Mean and standard deviation were used for data analysis. The findings of the study were that public libraries in Benue State provide services such as photocopying, loan, reference and current awareness services. Public libraries in Benue State employ channels such as newspapers, textbooks, health information journals, and posters to provide health information services to PLWHA. Factors such as place of abode, mobility, low level of education, previous experience and awareness of health information services in Benue State among others were the challenges faced by PLWHA in accessing health information services in Benue State. Recommendations such as: government should make more funds available to public libraries to provide health information to PLWHA; special grant should be set aside by law for PLWHA in Benue State; adult education programmes should be made available for PLWHA, ICT services should be provided in public libraries; public libraries should repackage health information in various format and translate same in local languages for PLWHA for easy access to health information among others.

INTRODUCTION

Health is the actualization of inherent and acquired human potentials through goal directed behaviours. competent self-care and satisfying relations with others. Every human being desires and hopes for good health. According to Priery (2006), the health of an individual can be seen as the extent of his or her continuing physical, emotional, mental and social ability to cope with the environment. Thus, health is most cherished and takes the upper and central task of not only the individual, but government and other established groups and institutions.

The importance of the health of PLWHA has been increasingly recognized all over the world. Ozioko (2007), assert that people who are unwell find it difficult to carryout their daily responsibilities. The reality of Human Immune Deficiency Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV and AIDS) pandemic and its devastative impact among the affected persons popularly know as People Living with HIV and (PLWHA) in the world is an unfortunate situation that the world is faced with. This is coupled with the inability by scientist to find a cure for the neither victims nor vaccine to prevent those not affected.

HIV and AIDS which was first discovered in the United States of America in 1981 among homo- sexual has spread to all nook and crannies of the world. The UNAIDS (2001), report states that, an estimated 40 million people are affected in the world with people in prime of their lives as worst hit. The prevalence and spread of this killer disease has become not only a leading cause of death but also a critical developmental issue. In Nigeria the scourge was first recorded in 1986 and from that period up to present, there has been a steady rise in the prevalent of HIV and AIDS scourge in the country. Out of 20 states in Nigeria that recorded HIV prevalent in 1996 Benue State was the second with 11.6%, Plateau State was first with 12.6%; while Oyo state was last with 02.26%. However, the 1999 sero-prevalence survey rated Benue State as having the highest prevalence in Nigeria with about 16.8%. Otukpo Local Government Area of Benue State

was singled out as having the highest HIV and AIDS prevalence rating. The current years 2007-2010 sero prevalence percentage of HIV and AIDS of Benue State stands at 10.0%. Beyond 5% prevalence, it is known that HIV and Aids epidemic has entered an explosive phase and has become a generalize problem of the entire population (Federal Ministry of Health 2004).

WHO report (2004), shows that life expectancy in Nigeria, particularly in Benue State is low. All over Benue State, HIV and AIDS is causing devastation destroying communities and families and taking away hope for the future. The impacts of HIV and AIDS are many in the absence of a cure and in most cases in the absence of adequate treatment: HIV and AIDS diminishes and destroys quality of life before it takes away life itself. Its emotional and economic impact of life quality affects families, friends and communities. It poses major problems for health systems and health care practices; it diminishes the capacity of societies to provide essential services and plan for the future and it threatens good governance and human security in Benue State. Although government and non governmental organizations have been very active in the chemotherapy treatment and prevention initiatives of HIV and AIDS, yet efforts have so far neglected a very good important aspect of PLWHA'S lives which is, the health information. Due to untimely and inadequate dissemination and difficulties in accessing health information, PLWHA die due to ignorance. Ijir (2005), noted that out of the total population of 39092,638 in Benue State, 238328 is infected with HIV and AIDS.

The importance of health information to PLWHA has been increasingly recognized all over the world. The National Mission Department (MND 2008), has describe health information services as an important tool for promoting healthy lifestyles. This involves giving the necessary, essential and timely information on crucial matters affecting people's health. This aims at ensuring that every individual has the required information that would prevent unhealthy practices. According to Edewor (2010), health information includes published and unpublished knowledge on all aspects of health and health care. Chen and Hemon (1982), maintain that, the presence of information creates

options for meaning decision and alternative approaches to solving a problem. On the other hand, Nwakaohu (1999), observed that, a society stagnates unless it makes constant provision for the injection and absorption of new knowledge. That is why public libraries which constitute networks within the total communication system depends on librarian's understanding of the nature of knowledge, importance and the information needs of the individuals and the society at large for effective service delivery.

Aboyade (1987), posits that to produce a desired change in human behavior, the process by which new information on health improvement methods are transferred from one person to another certainly deserves the most attention. In this regards, PLWHA need information, especially information on HIV and AIDS for survival but may hardly know how to access it. Information may not be accessed by every person at the same time of dissemination; there is need for preservation of information for future use through the public library services.

Public libraries have the mandate to provide appropriate information services for people at all levels, such information could be in print or electronic format. Okeh (1999), reiterates that information is needed on daily basis no matter one's status in the society but lamented the inability of PLWHA to obtain and use relevant information services in Benue State. This study therefore seeks to investigate the challenges of accessing health information services by PLWHA in Benue State.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The Purpose of the Study are:

1. To investigate health information services provision to PLWHA in Benue State.
2. To identify channels of health information services to PLWHA in Benue State.
3. To investigate the challenges encountered by PLWHA in accessing health information services in Benue State.
4. To proffer suggestions to overcome challenges by PLWHA in accessing health information services in Benue State.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the public library services in providing health information services provision to PLWHA in Benue State?
2. What are the channels of providing health information services to PLWHA in Benue State?
3. What are the challenges of accessing health information services by PLWHA in Benue State?
4. What are the strategies to overcome the challenges of accessing health information services by PLWHA in Benue State?

METHODOLOGY

A survey design was used of the study. The area of study was Benue State. The population was sixteen thousand, five hundred and two (16,502). This comprised of fourteen (14) public librarians and sixteen thousand four hundred and eighty eight (16488) PLWHA. The proportionate stratified sampling technique was used to draw a sample of 824 PLWHA from three general hospitals and the Federal Medical Centre in Benue State.

The hospitals are General Hospital Adikpo from zone 'A' (49), General Hospital Gboko (150) zone 'B', General Hospital Otukpo (152) zone 'C' and Federal Medical Centre Makurdi (474). However, all the 14 public librarian were used for the study as there was no need for sampling because of smallness of the population. This brought the overall sample for the study to eight hundred and thirty eight (838). The instrument for data collection was questionnaire. Two sets of questionnaire were designed to collect data. The first set was designed for public librarians titled: services of public libraries in providing services to PLWHA. The second set was designed for PLWHA and was tagged: challenges in accessing health information by PLWHA. The instrument was administered to the respondents by the researchers. The instrument for data collection

was frequency, mean and standard deviation. 824 questionnaires were distributed to PLWHA, 734 were retrieved.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Responses of public librarians on health information services to PLWHA in Benue State.

No:14

S/No	Services	\bar{X}	STD
1	Photocopying service	3.78	.57
2	Loan service	3.71	.46
3	Reference service	3.42	.57
4	Current awareness service	2.50	.72
5	Selective disseminating of information service	2.21	.89
6	Indexing and abstracting	2.21	1.31
7	Health Extension service	2.07	.82
8	Counseling service	1.92	.91
9	Referral information service	1.82	1.09
10	Internet	1.78	.80

From the table above services were ranked in descending order, of provision. It was observed that only 4 items have mean score of 2.50 and above and with low standard deviation less than 1. The services are: photocopying, loan reference and current awareness services. It was also observed that public libraries in Benue State do not provide services such as indexing and abstracting, selective dissemination of information, health extension service, counseling, referral and information and internet services.

This could be due to inadequate staff and funds. This is because public libraries do not generate funds themselves. What comes to them is purely from the government and charity organization. In Nigeria, there is no law by the government to set aside a certain capital of allocation to public libraries yet.

Table 2: Responses of public librarians on channels of providing health information services to PLWHA in Benue State.

No: 14

S/No	Channels	\bar{X}	STD	Decision
1	Provision of health information in newspapers	3.28	.61	Agree
2	Health information provision in textbooks	3.28	.46	Agree
3	By regular subscription of health information in journals/magazines	2.78	.89	Agree
4	Health information on posters	2.57	.85	Agree
5	Health information on cyber space	1.50	.51	Disagree
6	Through health talk on clinic centers	1.7	.97	Disagree
7	Health information provision on radio programme	1.64	.84	Disagree
8	Health information provision through television programme	1.57	.85	Disagree
9	By organizing workshops/seminars	1.57	.85	Disagree
10	By Folklore	1.50	.51	Disagree

Table 2 above is the responses of public librarians on the channels of provision of health information services to PLWHA in Benue State. It revealed that only 4 items have mean value of 2.50 and above with low standard deviations. The items include: provision of health information through news papers, provision of health information in textbooks, provision of health information through journals/magazines and provision of health information through poster. The other 6 items have mean values below 2.50 with high standard deviation which is an indication that such channel are inadequately employed or not employed at all. This study is consistent with that of Aju (2007), on “an evaluation study of information dissemination by agencies on HIV and AIDS awareness in Benue State”. That information providers do not employ programmes on radio, internet, television, workshops and other mass media. This probably could be as a result of inadequate staff and fund. It could be observed that only 14 librarians are available to serve over sixteen thousand PLWHA the general public.

Table 3: Responses of PLWHA on challenges of accessing health information services in Benue State.

No: 734

S/No	Challenges	\bar{X}	STD	Decision
1	Place of abode	3.43	.85	Agree
2	Mobility	3.41	.72	Agree
3	Low level of education	3.29	1.01	Agree
4	Previous experience and awareness of PLWHA availability of health information services in Benue state.	3.29	1.06	Agree
5	Poor communication network	3.24	1.04	Agree
6	Cultural restrictions	3.23	1.12	Agree
7	Language barrier	3.19	.98	Agree
8	Poverty	3.13	1.07	Agree
9	Stigma and dissemination	3.04	1.22	Agree
10	Incessant power cut in public libraries.	3.04	1.16	Agree

Table 3 has revealed the challenges of PLWHA in accessing health information services in Benue State. From the table all the 10 items have mean value above the accepted mean value of 2.50 with low standard deviation indicating that all the items pose challenges to PLWHA in accessing health information services: This study is consistent with disconfirmation theory by Churchill and Suprenent (1982), that customers evaluate the merchandise and the purchase experience based on some cognitive standards such as expectations, customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction results from a comparison with the merchandise indication whether it is better than before the purchase is made.

Table 4: PLWHA responses on strategies to overcome the challenges of accessing health information services in Benue State.

No: 734

S/No	Strategies	\bar{X}	STD	Decision
1	Public librarians should show love and empathy to PLWHA and not discriminate.	3.43	.85	Agree
2	Public libraries should be situated in central areas of easy accessibility	3.41	.72	Agree
3	Government should establish adult education	3.41	.72	Agree
4	Public libraries should create awareness services to the general public	3.20	1.04	Agree
5	Government should by law set aside special grant for PLWHA	3.16	1.05	Agree
6	Public libraries should translate resources and conduct programmes in local languages	3.13	1.07	Agree
7	Public libraries should organize seminar/workshops on dangers of some cultures.	3.10	1.33	Agree
8	Government should improve public power supply and provide standby generators for public libraries	3.10	1.33	Agree
9	Government should employ more staff in public libraries	3.10	1.33	Agree
10	Public libraries should repackage health information in various forms.	3.04	1.6	Agree

Data from table 4 revealed that all the items suggested strategies can be employed to overcome the challenges of accessing health information by PLWHA through public library services.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study on challenges of accessing health information by PLWHA through public library services in Benue State has underscored public library services to PLWHA in Benue State. Modern services such as internet, health extension, indexing and abstracting, selective dissemination of information are not provided. Only channels such as health information provision on textbooks, newspapers, journals and posters are provided. Other channels such as radio and television programmes, use of cyber space, health talks at clinic centres, organizing seminars and workshops, folklore among others are not employed by public libraries in Benue State to provide health information to PLWHA. PLWHA encounter some challenges in accessing health information through public library services. Among the challenges are place of abode, mobility, low level of education, poverty, poor communication network, cultural restriction, language barrier. Based on the proffered suggestions, the following recommendations are made;

1. Government should employ more librarians to provide services to PLWHA in Benue State. A situation whereby only fourteen librarians are available to provide services to a large member of the communities is not the best.
2. Government should make more funds available to public libraries to provide modern services and employ more channels such as ICT.
3. Government should set aside grant for PLWHA to alleviate their poverty. This will go a long way by enabling them acquire radio sets, television sets, computer units as well as other resources that will enable them get access to the public library services. It will as well enable them to visit public libraries to them.
4. Public libraries in Benue State should be Information and Communication Technology (ICT) compliant. Consequently, public libraries should be equipped with modern technologies such as computers, internet and television sets to be able to provide effective health information to the public.

5. Public libraries should repackage health information resources for PLWHA in various forms and formats and translate same in local government.
6. Adult education programmes should be organized for PLWHA by the government.

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