

Health Communication and Port Harcourt Residents' Perception of the Coverage of Diabetes Mellitus in Select Newspapers

Ikechi, Chibitam Kem
Chibitam_ikechi@uniport.edu.ng
+2348153434524
(Corresponding Author)

Prof W.C. Ihejirika,
walter.ihajirika@uniport.edu.ng
+2348034903041

Dr S.C. Mbazie
+2348037083679
chibitam_ikechi@uniport.edu.ng

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Abstract

This work analysed health communication and Port Harcourt residents' perception of newspaper coverage of diabetes. The objectives were to: examine the level of exposure of Port Harcourt residents to the diabetes health messages; examine the perception of Port Harcourt residents on newspaper coverage of diabetes. The work was anchored on the Perception theory and development media theory. The population in Port Harcourt and Obio/Akpor is projected from 2006 census to 2022 using the 2.5 projection rate. Therefore, the population for this study shall be (6,498,395) six million, four hundred and ninety-eight thousand three hundred and ninety-five (UNDP). The sample size of 400 was drawn using the Krejcie and Morgan sample size table. The purposive sampling technique was used to select residents of Port Harcourt who are newspaper readers. Findings revealed that residents' of Port Harcourt get diabetes messages from newspapers and other channels like family and friends, television and most importantly from broadcast medium. The study also showed that residents' of Port Harcourt Metropolis have a positive view on the newspaper been adequate for the coverage of health issues which also includes diabetes mellitus. The study recommended that Nigerian newspapers should publish editorials, features and photographs on diabetes prevention and management and other health related issues, because it will help increase the awareness of readers and help them appreciate prevention and management of diabetes intervention and other health intervention programmes available to them.

Keyword: Health, communication, perception, Port Harcourt

INTRODUCTION

Communication is the passing of information, feelings and emotions from one person to another. Gill (2007) also defines communication as the passing of information or message through a medium from the sender to the receiver with the possibility of gathering a feedback. Communication according to Ugoajah (1985) involves acts of transmitting messages through channels which link people to the languages and symbolic codes which are used to transmit message; the means by which messages are received and stored and the rules, customs and conventions which define and regulate human relationships and events. Hassan (2013) defines communication as the process of sharing or exchange of ideas, information, knowledge, attitude or feeling among two or more people through certain signs and symbols.

It is important we communicate with others; it could be for any of the followings reasons, to express our views about an issue; inform people about what is happening in their environment or the world. The aim of every communication is to impact knowledge and this can only take place if that communication is effective, Windahl et al (1992) as argues that one must engage in the rule of communication planning in which information, attitudes, emotions and ideas are exchanged and transmitted through specific channels. Health crises are unavoidable in the life, ranging from outbreaks, periodical epidermis. Therefore, it becomes important to adopt different strategies to communicate fact-based, transparent and accountable messages with the general public. Therefore, communication becomes a way of life and an essential aspect of human existence that is needed in everyday activities of man

Health journalism is also known as medical journalism that deals with writing stories or reports that are health-related for daily or weekly publication in the news media. According to Hodgetts and Chamberlain (2006, p. 318), “the media provide a shared understanding of notions of health, illness and disease.”. Media can affect people’s ideas about a health risk, which could lead them to become unnecessarily concerned about low risk diseases while undermining the risks of serious and preventable diseases (Gardner, 2008, p. 161). Thus, media coverage of health issues can ultimately drive public policy and healthcare decisions (Bomlitz and Brezis, 2008, p. 202). Thus, for Kline (2006, p. 52), “if we acknowledge that the media are an important force in society, then we must continue to find ways to tease out the nuanced meanings and implications of the media representations. Health journalism is the gathering, writing and editing of health-related stories by the media for public consumption. Uzuegbunam, Duru, Okafor and Ugbo (2016) as cited in Konye (2022) refers to it as (medical journalism) the gathering and reporting of facts about health in the society via the media (p. 29). Health journalism is a part of journalism that has its own distinguished areas. They feel that health-related reports should be “accurate, fair, balanced and complete” (p. 110).

The journalist at every point is required to make sure every details published are complete, there must be balanced presentations of all sides of the story reported in the news media. The mass media must give significant time and resource in enhancing behavior change, the media plays a crucial role in health promotion which is very pivotal for social development of any society. Health promotion is the aspect of the mass media, which is aimed at promoting the quality health for every individual.

WHO (1986) defined health education or promotion is the combinations of learning experiences which is geared towards helping individuals and communities have control over their health. Since the media play a crucial role in informing and educating people about happenings around them. From the foregoing the media can be used successfully to disseminate health messages aimed at created awareness on a disease or outbreak.

For Hinnant (2009) health journalism is a basic source of information for the general public to get informed about their health as well as medical development, technology and new research in the health sector (p.692). The media is the primary sources of information dissemination to the general public. The media play a huge role as political and social force and the power to influence every area of our lives (Altschull, 1995). The media play a role of change agent for the positive growth and influences the health behavior of people, it aids in reinforcing the existing health belief and attitude. From the foregoing it is worthy to note that the media helps or is instrumental in enforcing behavior change about health.

Health education is one of the numerous roles that health journalism owes the society. If journalists are expected to be conscious, they educate the masses through their information sharing, then, they ought to be cautious in the coverage of stories that are reported. Sharma (2015) opines that the print media play a crucial role in informing and educating the general public about occurrences related to their day to day lives, he goes to say that the newspaper provides detailed and comprehensive on every topic.

Tuner and Orange (2013) suggest that journalists are required to be guided by their code of conduct and tenets of journalism when they carry out their duties. Not neglecting the impact messages have on the lives of individuals. Ikems (2022) opines that the interest of the larger audience should be the main focus of every journalist. Health stories should also be presented in a way that it will not mislead the general public, when there is need for them to make critical decisions regarding their health and safety. Hinnant (2009) opines that the profession of health journalism is being criticised by physicians and scientists of misleading the public with “incomplete, false, oversimplified or premature medical coverage” of health stories. This view is also shared by Obregon and Waisbord (2012), they feel that reporters who cover health-related stories are often faced with challenges.

The media mediate and partially construct people’s understandings of health and health-related issues (Strand, 2010, p. 225). Communication, according to Sharma (n.d), is at the heart of health care and health promotion. (McIntyre, Suggs, Will, Sarah, Peter 2017) revealed that many health decisions occur in places other than medical environment, it is important that people are provided with accurate health information. Patients and health care consumers have showed greater interest for more health information, but are often unable to obtain the relevant newspapers. Different approaches are employed to find health information by health conscious people, those engaged in healthy lifestyles, health issues and health information practices, are more likely to recognize health information, even if it is unintended. Department of Health and Human service as cited in Parvanta (2011) defined media and health communication as the study of the use of communication methods to influence peoples’ decision.

THE PROBLEM.

Pan American Health Organisation and WHO predicted in 2022 that currently 422 million people worldwide have diabetes and majority living in low and middle income countries, causing (1.5million) global deaths. The number of diabetics has increased since the outbreak of COVID-19. Diabetes is on the rise, it is no longer a disease of predominantly rich nations, and the prevalence of Diabetes is steadily increasing everywhere. Unfortunately, in Nigeria the lack of the disease not being pursued, as part of the 2030 effective policies to create supportive environment for healthy lifestyle means that the prevention and treatment of Diabetes particularly for people of modest means, are not being pursued. Globally, between 2000 and

2016, there was 5% increase in premature mortality from diabetes. Scholars have accused the newspapers in Nigeria of under reporting issues of health. This study is set to find out Port Harcourt residents' level of exposure and the perception of Port Harcourt residents towards the coverage of health problems especially diabetes mellitus prevention in the newspaper. Also to what extent has the coverage of prevention and management of diabetes mellitus in Nigerian newspapers affected their acceptance of medical interventions. Is the newspaper adequate in providing information on health prevention and management?

Aim and objectives of the study

The aim of this study is to examine Port Harcourt residents' perception on the coverage of diabetes in the newspapers.

The objectives are to:

- i. Examine the level of exposure of Port Harcourt Residents' to diabetes mellitus health messages in the newspapers
- ii. Examine the perception of Port Harcourt residents' on newspaper coverage of diabetes mellitus.

HYPOTHESIS

There is no significant relationship between newspaper coverage of diabetes mellitus prevention and Port Harcourt residents' perception

There is no significant relationship between information relied upon by Port Harcourt residents and newspaper coverage of diabetes

There is no significant relationship between Port Harcourt residents' exposure to diabetes mellitus messages and newspaper coverage

Theoretical framework

Perception theory

Berelson and Steiner are the proponents of the perception theory. The theory states that individuals or people have different ways of shutting out or interpreting messages that is not in line with their belief. It simply means that individuals most times process media messages to suit the world around them. Cohen and Weimann (2000) explained his definition of perception as the "complex process by which people select, organize, and interpret sensory stimulation into meaningful and coherent picture of the world" Anaeto & Osifeso (2008) noted that the theory tells us the process of interpreting messages is complicated and that these goals may be difficult to attain. This theory is relevant to this work because the study is aimed at finding out Port Harcourt residents' perception on newspaper coverage of diabetes. This is relevant because the study is centred on the perception of Port Harcourt residents.

Development media theory

Development media theory advocates that the media should partner with the government in the nations building and that the government should control the media as well as journalists to achieve development (Asemah, Nwammuo & Nkwam-Uwaoma, 2016). According to the theory the media are to be used for the good of the society. The media can be used as an agent for achieving economic growth, medical advocacy, cultural development and national sovereignty. The theory argues that media should not be critical of the government rather they should be supportive. As the name implies, the theory relates to media in developing nations. Asemah

(2011) define the theory thus “it is all about positive engagement and the usage of the media in national identity of a particular nations ”

McQuail (1987) identified the major characteristics of development theory as follows: Journalist and other media workers have responsibilities as well as freedom in their information gathering and dissemination tasks.

Media should give priority in news and information to link with other developing countries, which are close geographically, culturally or politically.

Freedom of the press should be opened to restriction according to economic priorities and development needs of the society. Media should accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy. In the interest of development ends the state has the right to intervene in or restrict media operations and devices of censorship, subsidy and direct control can be justified. This theory is also relevant because a healthy nation is a wealthy nation which in turn creates wealth and productivity which leads to a nation’s development.

Mass media and Health Communication

Communication is an integral part of us as humans. It is human way of exchanging information, feelings and emotions. It plays an instrumental role, an effective health communication can help raise awareness of health risks and possible solutions. Provide the motivation and skills needed to reduce these risks, help them find support from other people in similar situations and affect or reinforce attitudes. Health communication is the art and technique of informing, influencing, and motivating individual, institutional, and public audiences about important health issues. Health communication encompasses the role of the information dissemination media in health.

Bello (2015) defines health communication as the process of promoting health by disseminating messages through mass media, interpersonal channels and events, including diverse activities such as clinical-patient interaction, classes, self- group, and mailing, mass media campaign events directed toward individuals, network, small group, organisation, communities or entire nation. Bello further explains that health communication is an effective approach in addressing public health problems and one of the important means of improving the health of individuals and the general population in the country. This is done through health literacy skills, which enables the public to understand and utilize information about health issues and diseases to achieve positive impact on health behaviour and health condition (Ishikwa & Kiuchi, 2010)

Succinctly, *Healthy People* (2010) assert that health communication is “the art and techniques of informing, influencing and motivating individual and public audiences about important health issues.” The scope of health communication according to *Healthy People* (2010, p.1) includes;

Disease prevention

Health promotion

Health care policy

Health care advocacy

Economic aspect of health care

Enhancement of the quality of life and health of individuals within the community

Methodology

The study adopted the survey method, the population in Port Harcourt and Obio/Akpor is projected from 2006 census to 2022 using the 2.5 projection rate. Therefore, the population for

this study shall be (6,498,395) six million, four hundred and ninety-eight thousand three hundred and ninety-five (UNDP). The sample size of 400 was drawn using the Krejcie and Morgan sample size table. The purposive sampling technique was used to select residents of Port Harcourt who are newspaper readers.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research and analysis of data

Survey Data

To elicit information for the survey aspect of the study, 400 copies of the research instrument was administered and only 336 were retrieved. These were also certified to be okay for the study.

Presents data on the age distribution of respondents, it indicates that most of the respondents are between ages of 18 and 70.

Age range	Frequency	Percentage
Below 18	5	1.5
18-25	77	22.9
26-35	196	58.3
36-45	14	4.2
45 and above	44	13.1
Total	336	100

The responses gotten from the respondents helped this work, the analysis indicated the best method adopted for dissemination of diabetes messages.

Sex Distribution of Respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Female	116	34.5
Male	220	65.4
Total	336	100

The above table clearly shows that men were 65 percent of the respondents. This is significant because data analysed was a reflection of the views of both gender. Diabetes issues are problems that affect both male and female so examining both genders was important to this study.

Research Question 1: What is the level of exposure of Port Harcourt Residents to diabetes messages in the newspapers?

Port Harcourt residents' level of exposure to diabetes mellitus messages.

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL	WMS	Level
People learn about diabetes from family and friends	120 (35.7)	132 (39.2)	54 (16.0)	30 (8.9)	336 (100)	3.0	high
People learn about diabetes from broadcast media	132 (39.2)	124 (36.9)	52 (15.4)	28 (8.3)	336 (100)	3.0	high
People learn about diabetes health issues from radio	175 (52)	100 (29.7)	45 (13.3)	16 (4.7)	336 (100)	3.2	very high

People read about diabetes from Print media	146 (43.4) 573	122 (36.3) 478	29 (8.6) 180	39 (11.6) 113	336 (100) 1344	2.8 high
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Grand Total

The numbers in parentheses are percentages indicate that respondents learnt about diabetes mellitus more from the broadcast media, some from their family and friends. From the table it is obvious that radio was the main source of information on diabetes prevention and management. Newspapers were not their major source of diabetes messages, newspapers had the lowest level.

Research question 2: How do Port Harcourt residents perceive newspaper coverage on diabetes prevention and management health issues?

Port Harcourt residents’ perception of newspaper coverage on diabetes prevention and management.

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Total	WMS	Level
Port Harcourt residents’ have a good perception of newspaper coverage of diabetes	123 (36.6)	129 (38.3)	54 (16.0)	30 (8.9)	336 (100)	3.0	High
Newspaper is a veritable tool for dissemination of information on diabetes	175 (52.0)	127 (37.7)	19 (10.1)	15 (5.6)	336 (100)	3.3	very high
Newspapers influence the decision people make regarding diabetes issues.	152 (45.2)	123 (36.6)	45 (13.3)	16 (4.7)	336 (100)	3.2	very high
Newspaper coverage of diabetes is adequate.	193 (57.4)	122 (36.3)	9 (2.6)	12 (3.5)	336 (100)	3.4	very high
	643	501	127	73	1344		

Grand total

From the table above, most of the respondents were of the view that newspapers are veritable tool for the dissemination of diabetes prevention and management messages.

Weighted mean score (WMS)= $\frac{FX}{F}$

The table shows that 28 percent of the respondents believe that reading newspapers encourages people to engage in healthy living. 50 percent indicated that they depend on newspapers on latest information about their health.

The three hypothesis for the study are for inferential analysis of whether there is or no relationship between health communication and Port Harcourt residents’ perception, and whether there is a relationship between the information relied upon and exposure level to diabetes mellitus message and newspaper coverage.

The chi-square goodness -of-fit test was used as a statistical test. The essence of the hypothesis test is to draw empirical and valid conclusion about the observed phenomenon.

Formula for chi-square:

$$X^2 = \sum (O_i - E_i)^2$$

Where:

O = observed frequency

E = expected frequency

Σ = summation

a. Decision Rule for Chi-square:

The null hypothesis is accepted and the alternative hypothesis is rejected if the calculated figure is less than the table value. In other words, the rejection of the null hypothesis signals an automatic acceptance of the alternate hypothesis since both hypotheses are complimentary.

b. Formula for Degree of Freedom $(C-1)(R-1) = df$

c. Probability Level $P > 0.05$

HO1 – There is no significant relationship between newspaper coverage of diabetes mellitus prevention and Port Harcourt residents’ perception.

Relationship between Port Harcourt residents’ perception and health communication

Variables	SA	A	D	SD	Total Row
	152	123	45	16	336
	193	122	9	12	336
Total	345	245	54	28	672

Chi-square Analysis of Variables in Newspaper health Coverage and Port Harcourt Residents Perception

Cell	O	E	O –E	$(O-E)^2$	$(O-E)^2/e$
E1	152	172.5	-20.5	420.25	2.43
E2	123	122.5	0.5	0.25	2.04
E3	45	27	18	324	12
E4	16	14	2	4	0.28
E5	193	198.1	-5.1	26.01	0.13
E6	122	88.9	33.1	1095.61	12.32
E7	9	1.44	7.56	57.15	39.6
E8	12	1	11	121	121
Calculated Chi-square					189.8
					X^2

$$X^2 = \Sigma (O_i - E_i)^2$$

Degree of Freedom DF = (C-1)(R-1) (2-1)(3-1) at 5% significance

$1 \times 2 = 2 =$ under 0.5

Degree of freedom is 2, according to Pearson’s chi-square = higher than 5.991.

$X^2 =$ calculated is 189.8

X^2 tabulated is 5.991

The degree of relationship between newspaper coverage of health and Port Harcourt residents' perception of diabetes coverage is 189.8 which is significant.

Decision:

Since X^2 calculated (189.8) is $> X^2$ tabulated (5.991), the null hypothesis is therefore, rejected and alternative hypothesis accepted. There is an actual relationship between the two variables.

Hypothesis Two

H_0^2 – There is no significant relationship between information relied upon by Port Harcourt residents' and newspaper coverage of diabetes.

Relationship between information relied upon and newspaper coverage

Variables	SA	A	D	SD	Total Row
	123	129	54	30	336
	175	127	19	15	336
Total	28	256	73	45	672

Chi-square Analysis on information relied upon and newspaper coverage of diabetes

Cell	O	E	O – E	(O-E) ²	(O-E) ² /e
E1	123	114	9	81	0.71
E2	129	128	1	1	7.8
E3	54	36.5	17.5	306.25	8.39
E4	30	22.5	7.5	56.25	2.5
E5	175	118	57	3249	27.5
E6	127	96.7	30.3	918.09	9.5
E7	19	4.12	14.88	220.41	53.5
E8	15	2.0	13	169	84.5
Calculated Chi-square					194.4
					X^2

$$X^2 = \sum (O_i - E_i)^2$$

Degree of Freedom DF = (C-1) (R-1) (2-1) (3-1) at 5% significant

$$1 \times 2 = 2 \text{ under } 0.5$$

Degree of freedom is 2, according to Pearson's chi-square = higher than 5.991.

The degree of relationship between information released upon and newspaper coverage of diabetes is 194.4 which is significant.

Decision Rule:

Since X^2 calculated (194.4) is $> X^2$ tabulated (5.991) the null hypothesis is therefore, rejected and alternative hypothesis accepted. There is an actual relationship between the two variables.

Hypothesis three

H_0^3 – There is no significant relationship between Port Harcourt residents' exposure to diabetes mellitus messages and newspaper coverage.

Relationship between residents exposure level to diabetes mellitus message and newspaper coverage

Variables	SD	A	D	SD	Total Row
	146	122	29	39	336
	120	132	54	30	336
Total	266	254	83	69	672

Chi-square Analysis of variables of exposure to message

Cell	O	E	O -E	(O-E) ²	(O-E) ² /e
E1	146	133	13	169	1.27
E2	122	127	5	25	0.19
E3	29	41.5	-12.5	156.25	3.19
E4	39	34.5	4.5	20.25	0.5
E5	120	95	25	625	6.5
E6	132	99.7	32.3	1043.29	10.46
E7	54	13.3	40.7	1656.5	124.5
E8	30	6.16	23.8	566.44	91.9
Calculated Chi-square					238.6
					X ²

$$X^2 = \sum (O_i - E_i)^2$$

Degree of Freedom DF = (C-1) (R-1) (2-1) (3-1) at 5% significant.

1x2 = 2 under 0.5

Degree of Freedom is 2, according to Pearson's chi-square = higher than 5.991

X² calculated is 238.6

X² tabulated is 5.991

The degree of relationship between exposure to messages of diabetes mellitus and newspaper coverage is 238.6 which is significant.

Decision Rule:

Since x² calculated (238.6) is > x² tabulated (5.991), the null hypothesis is therefore, rejected and alternative hypothesis accepted. There is an actual relationship between the two variables

Major findings

The studies revealed that residents' of Port Harcourt get health messages from other channels like radio, television and most importantly from their friends and family and the study also showed that residents' of Port Harcourt Metropolis have a positive view of newspaper been adequate for the coverage of health issues which also includes diabetes mellitus. The study revealed the newspaper have the advantage of space, therefore they can use pictures, editorials and feature stories to explain more about health problems that affect human lives.

Port Harcourt residents have a positive perception of the newspaper, finding reveal that the newspaper is a better source of detailed information when compared to other medium.

Conclusion

It also revealed that Port Harcourt have positive perception on the newspaper coverage of diabetes. They found newspaper to be a veritable tool for the dissemination of health messages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Nigerian newspapers should publish editorials, features, photographs etc on health problems. This will deepen the awareness by the readers and help them appreciate prevention and management of diseases and intervention programmes.

Also, One or 2 pages should be allotted to stories on health to allow for in depth coverage. Editorials and the use of pictures will pass an adequate message and increase readers' knowledge on health issues.

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