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Rural Women and their Information Seeking Behavior

Abstract

This study is focused at exploring the information seeking behaviour of the women in rural areas. The study adopted a survey design. Four objectives were laid down for the study and a structured interview and questionnaire was used to bring out information from respondents. The findings showed that among the 294 respondents, 41% of them are 31-40 years of age, 24% of the respondents are below 30 years of age, 18% are between the ages of 41-50 years of age among others. The study also revealed majority of the women have secondary school education with 44% of them admitting that they are secondary school certificate holder. The study shows that the information needs of rural women in the top rank are occupational related with 85% of respondents, child care and family relationship with 64% of respondents. The study clearly indicates that the major source of information for the respondents is friends and family members with 95% of the respondents attesting to that, another 75% of the respondents indicated age groups as their source of information. The study revealed that the major use of information by respondents was to improve their Occupation with 91% of respondents, to care for children and run the family with 78% of respondents. It is clear from the study that no library resources is the major barrier to the access of information by respondents with 98%, illiteracy with 76% of respondents, language barriers with 66% respondents, among others. Recommendations were put forward to enhance access to information by women in the rural areas.

Introduction

The National Population Census of 2006 puts Nigeria's population to 150 million while the population of women in Nigeria accounted to Fifty two (52%) percent of the total population and about 45% of them live in the rural areas, the highest percentage of which are in the Northern part of Nigeria (Saleh and Lasisi, 2011, Nigeria Population Census, 2006). Over two-thirds of the world's 796 million illiterate people are women, many of whom live in rural areas. In Cambodia, 48% of rural women and 14% of rural men are unable to read or write (UNESCO, 2010).

Rural women from the view point of the researchers are women that reside in the rural region of the country with low literacy rates. They are resourceful economic agents who contribute to the income of families and the growth of communities in a multitude of ways. They work as entrepreneurs, farmers and non-farm labourers, in family businesses, for others and as self-employed; while they take on a disproportionate share of unpaid work at home. However, their contribution is limited by unequal access to resources as well as persistent discrimination and gender norms which need to be addressed to allow the realization of their full potential (Inpapermagazine, 2013).

The women in the rural areas of Nigeria are classified as assets to their immediate families and communities where they reside as majority of them are actively involved in agriculture which is

the basic sector of the Nigerian rural economy. Aina (2004) posit that outside farming, rural women are equally involved in such occupations like pottery, dyeing of clothes, cloth making, petty trading, hair dressing, craftwork, tailoring etc. They are faced with a lot of challenges, which may include health issues, lack of finance and inadequate information sources. A recent UNESCO report revealed that the level of poverty in Nigeria is increasing at an alarming rate and the situation is worst in the Northern part, particularly the North East where Borno is situated and women constitute the highest population in these areas (Saleh and Lasisi, 2011, UNESCO, 2009).

The information seeking behaviour of women in the urban part of the country differs from those in the rural parts because women in the urban part of the country are exposed to technologies and evolving environment which aid their quick access to information than those in rural communities.

Dutta (2009) reported that “there is relatively small number of studies done on the information behavior of the citizens of developing countries”, and that, “the few concentrated on the educated individuals and the urban population located in the large cities than on citizens who live in the rural areas.” This study therefore seeks to increase the wealth of literature on the information seeking behaviour of rural women in Nigeria.

Knowing the information seeking behaviour of these special sets of people categorized as the weaker sex would enable libraries and information centers step up in their services targeted towards them which would improve their access to sources of information to meet their various information needs.

Objective of the Study

This study is aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- To identify the information needs of rural women
- To identify the sources of information the rural women are familiar with
- To know how rural women use information
- To identify factors that poses barrier to the access of information by rural women

In order to guide the researchers in this study, the following questions were designed in line with the objective of the study:

- What are the information needs of rural women?
- What are the sources of information the rural women are familiar with?
- To what use the rural women put the information obtained?

- What are the factors militating against the accessibility of information to meet their needs?

Literature Review

The study of information needs and gathering behavior dates back to 1948 when Bernal and others presented a paper on scientific information at the 1948 Royal Society conference (Bernal, 1960). According to Wilson (1999, 2000), information-seeking behavior includes "those activities a person may engage in when identifying their own needs for information, searching for such information in any way, and using or transferring that information.

Scholars around the world have not relented in their efforts to study the information seeking behaviours of different categories of individuals: engineers, lawyers, illiterates, fishermen, farmers, librarians and even students. In this study, the researchers will be concentrating on women living in some rural communities in Nigeria. According to Ukachi (2007) rural women refers to women living and residing in an isolated area in which virtually all economic and social services necessary for life enjoyment are lacking.

A lot of studies have been conducted on the information seeking behaviour of rural women around the world with only a few in Nigeria. Saleh and Lasisi (2011) carried out a study on the information seeking behaviour of rural women in Borno State, Nigeria. The findings of their research showed that the sources of information available to the rural women include both formal and informal sources. The most preferred source of information for the rural women in Borno State is the informal source as they rely on information gotten from friends, relatives, husband, children and fellow market women.

Ukachi (2007) undertook a study on the information needs, sources and Information seeking behaviour of rural women in Badagry, Lagos, Nigeria. The findings revealed that 93.5% of rural women in Badagry need information on fertilizers and seeds. Similarly, Nwagwu and Ajama (2011) carried out a study on Women's health information needs and information sources in a rural oil palm business community in South- Western Nigeria. The findings showed that the most frequently mentioned health information need is malaria with 85.4% of respondents.

Mooko (2005) investigated information needs and information-seeking behaviour of rural, uneducated women and their families in three villages in Botswana. She found that most information needs are health-related, such as information regarding certain diseases, how they are contacted, and treated. Hossain & Islam (2012) studied information needs of rural women in three villages of Bangladesh. It shows that Bangladesh Rural women need information on

agriculture, food and nutrition, livestock, health, family planning, child education, etc. Women in rural areas of Bangladesh are highly dependent on their friends and neighbors to get the information they need in their daily lives.

Ahmad (2011) carried out a study on the Information Seeking Behaviours of Rural Women in Malaysia. This study reveals that the women in Malaysia are concerned with information needs related to food and child education.

Dasgupta (2004) conducted a study on users and non-users of information in rural areas in India. The study tries to examine the information needs of the rural communities. The needs identified included income generation, community leadership, environmental issues like pollution, climatic change, disasters, etc., community health, literacy support, educational opportunities, employment, bank loans, government policies, transportation, communication and sanitation.

Zhang and Yu (2009) discussed the major research studies conducted on rural information needs and acquisition in China. They concluded that rural dwellers in China have an extensive range of information needs, with agricultural technology, market information, income generation and policy information being the most needed types; they further reported that rural dwellers in China rely on interpersonal relationships for acquiring both general information and information for agriculture production.

Iqbal, Yousaf and Soroya (2013) carried out a study of the information need and seeking behaviour of rural women in Soon Valley, Pakistan, which shows that the factors that poses barrier to the accessibility of information by rural women includes; less resource as there is no single public library in that area and lack of time among others.

Methodology

A descriptive survey method was adopted for the study. Questionnaire was the main instrument used for data collection, while oral interview was used to clarify some aspects of the questionnaire found unclear. As few literate women were able to complete the questionnaire on their own, most had to be interviewed and their responses were used to complete the questionnaires. The population of the study is made up of three (3) rural communities in Ondo state, Nigeria which Includes: Odigbo, Laje and Igbado communities of Ondo State. One hundred (100) respondents will be selected from each community making it a total of three hundred (300) respondents which will be selected via random sampling. The researchers trained two (2) research assistant that joined in the distribution and retrieval of the questionnaires, they also assisted in the interviewing of the illiterate rural women using the Yoruba Language. During

data collection, the researchers were opportune to view rural women in their natural habitat, working in their farms, trading and some others performing household chores. Out of the 300 questionnaires distributed to the rural women in the three communities, the researchers were able to retrieve a total of 294, thus there was 98% response rate. Data collected was analyzed using tables, percentages and frequency distribution.

Result and Discussion of findings

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Respondents (Rural Women) by Age

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Below 30	70	24%
31-40	120	41%
41-50	54	18%
51- 60	40	14%
61 and above	10	3%
Total	294	100%

Table 1 shows the demographic information about the ages of the respondents. The result however revealed that among the 294 respondents, 41% of them are 31-40 years of age, 24% of the respondents are below 30 years of age, 18% of the respondents are between ages of 41-50 years, those who are 51-60 years are 14% while 3% of the respondents are 61 years of age and above.

Table 2: Level of Education of respondents

Level of Education	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Non Formal Education	72	25%
Primary	62	21%
Secondary	130	44%
Tertiary	30	10%
Total	294	100%

Table 2 indicates the level of education of the respondents. The result shows that majority of the women have secondary school education with 44% of them admitting that they are secondary school certificate holder, 25% of the respondents have non- formal education, 21% of the respondents have primary school education while only 10% of the respondents have tertiary education.

Table 3: Information needs of Respondents

Information Needs	No of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Occupation (Farming,	249	85%

Sewing, Trading etc.		
Child care & family relationships	189	64%
Health Related	165	56%
Procedures for performing tasks	127	43%
Housekeeping and household maintenance	98	33%
About education & schooling	71	24%
Government Policies/ Politics	29	10%

Table 3 Shows that the information needs of rural women in the top rank is occupational related with 85% of respondents, child care and family relationship with 64% of respondents, health related information needs with 56% of respondents, information on procedures of performing tasks with 43% of respondents, information on housekeeping and household maintenance with 33% of respondent, information on education and schooling with 24% of respondents and information on government policies/ politics with 10% of respondents.

Table 4: Sources of Information of Respondents

Sources of Information	No of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Friends and Family Members	279	95%
Age Group	221	75%
Health Workers	217	74%
Television/ Radio	174	59%
Churches and Mosques	127	43%
Village, Drums & Town criers & Whistling.	97	33%
Internet	61	21%
Library	10	3%

Table 4 clearly indicates that the major source of information for the respondents is friends and family members with 95% of the respondents attesting to that, another 75% of the respondents indicated age groups as their source of information, 74% of the respondents specified health workers as their information source, 59% of the respondents denotes television and radio as their information source, churches and mosques with 43% of respondents, Village, Drums & Town criers & Whistling with 33% of respondents, internet with 21% of respondents while library 3% of respondents

Table 5: Information use of Respondents

Information Use by Respondents	No of Respondents	Percentage (%)
To improve my Occupation	269	91%
To care for my children and run the family	235	78%
To improve my health care	187	64%
To maintain my household better	115	39%
To improve my procedures of performing tasks	103	35%
To improve my education	71	24%
To know new government policies and understand politics	44	15%

Table 5 shows that the major use of information by respondents was to improve their Occupation with 91% of respondents, to care for children and run the family with 78% of respondents, to improve health care with 64% of respondents, to maintain household with 39% of respondents, to improve procedures of performing task with 35% of respondents, to improve education with 24% of respondents, to know new government policies and understand politics with 15% of respondents.

Table 6: Barriers to the access to Information by Respondents

Barriers in Information Seeking	No of Respondents	Percentage (%)
No Library Resources	287	98%
Illiteracy	223	76%
Language Barriers	195	66%
Lack of Time	171	58%
High Cost of electronic Gadgets	98	33%

From **Table 6** above, it is clear that no library resources is the major barrier to the access of information by respondents with 98%, illiteracy with 76% of respondents, language barriers with 66% respondents, lack of time with 58% of respondents and high cost of electronic gadgets with 33% of respondents.

Discussion of Findings

Table 1 reflected the distribution of rural women by age; the result revealed that among the 294 respondents 24% are below 30 years of age, 41% of respondents are between 31-40 years of age, 18% of respondents are within 41-50 years of age, 14% of respondents are within 51-60 years of age, while 3% are 61 years and above, this means that majority of the respondents are within the age bracket of 31-40 years. **Table 2** indicates the level of education of Respondents, and it was revealed that majority of the women have secondary school education with 44%, while 25% have non- formal education, 21% have only primary school certificates and only 10% have B.Sc degrees. **Table 3** confirm that the information needs of rural women in the top rank is occupation related with 85% of respondents and this finding is in agreement with the study of Hossain and Islam (2012) who found out that the major information needs of rural women in Bangladesh is agricultural needs with 86.66% of respondents and this can also be classified under occupational information needs, other needs includes; child care and family relationship with 64% of respondents, health related information needs with 56% of respondents, information on procedures of performing tasks with 43% of respondents, information on housekeeping and household maintenance with 33% of respondent, information on education and schooling with 24% of respondents and information on government policies/ politics with 10% of respondents. **Table 4** clearly indicates that the major source of information for the rural women is friends and family members with 95% of respondents and this is in accordance with the study of Saleh and Lasisi (2011) who found out that rural women align more to information gotten from friends, relatives, husbands, sons and daughters, and market women, others sources includes; age group with 75% of respondents, health workers with 74% of respondents, television and radio with 59% of respondents, churches and mosques with 43% of respondents, Village, Drums & Town criers & Whistling with 33% of respondents, internet with 21% of respondents and library with 3% of respondents. **Table 5** shows that the major reason for using information sources was to improve their occupation as indicated by 91% of respondents, to care for children and run the family with 78% of respondents, to improve health care with 64% of respondents, to maintain household with 39% of respondents, to improve procedures of performing task with 35% of respondents, to improve education with 24% of respondents, to know new government policies and understand politics with 15% of respondents. This shows that the major reason why rural women seek information is to improve their occupational knowledge base, consequently helping them to increase their standard of living and live above poverty. **Table 6** made it clear that lack of library resources is the major barrier to the access of information by the rural women in the selected communities with 98% of respondents admitting to that fact, and this is in agreement with the study of Iqbal, Yousaf and Soroya (2013) which indicates that in Soon Valley, Pakistan

there is neither a single Public Library existing in the communities nor the school or college libraries and this has hindered the access to information by the rural women in the area.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Certain conclusions can be drawn from the study that the rural women from Odigbo, Laje and Igbado communities all from Ondo state, Nigeria, know the importance of information as majority of the rural women use family members, friends and relatives as their major source of information whenever they have a need. They use the information they get to understand their occupation better, as farming is the major source of livelihood for the rural women in the studied communities. One of the major barriers militating against access to information by rural women in Nigeria is lack of adequate library resources. Many rural areas in Nigeria lack standard library services to meet the needs of the citizenry of that area, some areas have no library at all serving the areas; this is a major barrier to the accessibility of information by rural women.

However, regardless of location, women tend to be the primary seekers of information for their children and other family members, as well as for themselves (Warner and Procaccino, 2004). Conclusively, public libraries in Nigeria still have a lot of work to do in marketing its services to the rural dwellers especially the women to facilitate their access to information which would eventually lead to a more literate society.

In view of the foregoing, the following recommendations were made:

- Public Libraries (staff) should go closer to the rural women and educate them on the services they provide that can meet some of their needs.
- The government should formulate rural women centered policies; this will enhance their standard of living in Nigeria.
- Libraries should purchase books in the local language of the rural communities so that the illiterate's rural women can also be a beneficiary of library services.
- Libraries should collaborate with media houses and other government information agencies in order to package and disseminate the right information that meet the needs of the rural women in different localities.
- Community outreach programmes should equally be organized and used to disseminate information that would aid the socio-economic, political and general enlightenment of the rural women.
- Family members, friends and relatives who are the major source of information to the rural women must always strive to disseminate the right information to them.

- The local government should equally organize adult education programme for the rural women as this will enhance their information utilization capacity
- The rural women should be encouraged to use electronic gadgets as this can help in their recreational readings, as all newspapers published in Nigeria are online.

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