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Information Seeking Behaviour of the Elderly Persons in Ethiope East, Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study is focused on examining the information-seeking behaviour of elderly persons in Ethiope East, Local Government Area. Four research objectives guided the study. A survey research design was adopted for the study. Two hundred (200) elderly persons were selected through systematic random sampling from each of the districts in the Ethiope East (Abraka, Otoro-Agbon, and Ovu) amounting to a sample size of six hundred (600) elderly persons used for the study. Questionnaires were used to elicit data from the respondent with the aid of three (3) research assistants who are proficient in the Urhobo language. The data collected via the questionnaire were analysed using the descriptive statistics method. Out of the 600 copies of the questionnaire distributed to the elderly respondents, the researchers were able to get the required information for analysis from 525 copies, thus, there was an 88% return rate. The findings revealed that the information needs of the elderly persons' understudy are mainly health-related information, COVID-19 information, and sources of finance-related information, among others. The findings also revealed that friends and family members, health professionals, radio, and television are the major sources of information for elderly persons, among others. The findings revealed the elderly use the information they get to meet health needs, understand about COVID-19 pandemic, get financial sources, to make a better life decisions, among others. The militating factors against the access and use of information by the elderly include declining physical abilities due to aging, inadequate patience from friends and family members, inadequate finance, lack of awareness of information sources, lack of information literacy/ search technique, among others. The researchers recommend that friends and family members caring for elderly persons should try to be patient with them to serve them better in meeting their information needs and government should sponsor information literacy programmes for the elderly to boost their information search and use as they strive to meet their information needs.

Keywords: Information Needs; Information Sources: Information Use; Information Seeking Behaviour; Elderly; Ethiope East

Introduction

Information seeking behaviour is a research area in the field of Library and Information Science that study different category of library users to ascertain their information needs, their information sources, how they demand information that meet their needs, the use to which they put the information they get and the challenges that militate against their access and use of information. Humans require information to be complete in every area of their lives. However, Bruce (2005) affirmed that Information plays a crucial role in our daily career and personal life, and we are continually challenged to take care of the information that we need for work, leisure, and everyday decisions and responsibilities. Information is useful to everyone irrespective of sex, age, profession, and race. Among the different categories of age seekers, the elderly population is the most neglected when it comes to information access and use. This is why Zou & Zhou, (2014) posited that the information-seeking behaviour of the older population, particularly in rural regions, has received little attention from researchers and is inadequately covered in information science literature This prompts the need to understand their information-seeking behaviour.

According to Ali and Jan (2020), information-seeking behavior is defined as the result of an information user's perception of a need, who, to satisfy that need, makes demands on formal or informal information sources or services, resulting in success or failure to find relevant information. According to World Health Organisation (2015), the majority of the world's developed countries have recognized the chronological age of 65 as a definition of an elderly or elderly person. The world's population is known to be aging, with more developed regions leading the way. The population of elderly people is increasing rapidly. Nigeria's population aged 65 and up was 2.8 percent in 2021. Though the number of Nigerians aged 65 and more has changed significantly in recent years, it has tended to decline from 1972 to 2021, ending at 2.8 percent in 2021 (Knoema, 2022). According to the World Health Organization (2022), the number of elderly persons worldwide would rise to 1.4 billion by 2030 and 2.1 billion by 2050. In most areas in Nigeria, most aged persons live in rural areas assisted by family, friends, and other members of their immediate communities.

Elderly persons like their younger counterparts require information for their survival and everyday information needs like health needs, current information needs, and sources of finance and technologies that could assist them. This study is aimed to explore the information-seeking behaviour of elderly persons in Ethiope East, Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the information-seeking behaviour of elderly persons in Ethiope East, Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria. The specific purpose of the study is to:

i. Find out the information needs of the elderly persons in Ethiope East, Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria.

ii. Identify the sources of information available to elderly persons.

iii. Established the use the elderly persons put the information they get.

iv. Find out the challenges militating against the accessibility and use of information by the elderly person.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be answered in the study:

i. What are the information needs of the elderly persons in Ethiope East, Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria?

ii. What are the sources of information available to elderly persons?

iii. What are the uses the elderly persons put in the information they get?

iv. What are the challenges militating against the accessibility and use of information by the elderly person?

Literature Review

The rapid increase in the number of older persons over the last few decades has had a considerable impact on the politics, socio-economic aspects of societies in both developed and developing nations. Ijiekhuamhen, Edewor, Emeka-Ukwu, and Egreajena (2016) studied elderly people and their information needs. The findings revealed that the information needs of the elderly persons were mainly health-related information, finance/ pension information, information required to make life decisions, information on transport, information on news and other current happenings, information on government policies, and other information needs. Zou and Zhou (2014) investigated the information requirements of the elderly in a Chinese rural community. The findings revealed that the elderly information needs were mainly physiological which is centered on information on food, clothing, shelter, care information. This is followed by information on keeping safe which contains information on healthcare, pension, policy information. They also seek effective related information which is centered on information about friends, family activities, club activities, among others. Also, Mansour (2021) investigated the information needs and behavior of Egyptian seniors living in care homes. The findings revealed that the Egyptian elderly most commonly sort for information related to their physical, medical, social, reasonable, and recreational needs. Barrett (2000) explored the actual information needs of seniors in the United Kingdom. In other words, the Barret study identified finance and benefits, community care support, home services and practical assistance, and housing as important areas of information needed for the elderly.

On the sources of information available to elderly persons, Patterson (2007) investigated the information sources used by older adults to make travel and tourist decisions. According to the data, the senior people surveyed preferred the following information sources: family,

experience, friends, magazines, newspapers, television, consumer publications, direct mail, point of purchase displays, neighbors, radio, and travel agents. Öngün, Güder, and Demirağ (2016) investigated Elderly People's Media Preferences and Perceived Loneliness. The findings show that television is a popular source of information and pleasure for the elderly. Chu, Fung, Tse, Tsang, Zhang, and Mai (2021) investigated how elderly people obtained information from various sources during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the data, the elderly mostly rely on newspapers and television, as well as other interpersonal sources such as friends and family members for their various information needs. Campbell and Nolfi (2005) discovered in a study that while seniors were willing to use the internet as a starting point for general knowledge when it involve to making informed healthcare decisions, the majority chose a physician-centered care approach. Kobayashi, Sato, Umegbak, and Chiba (2017) investigated the Information sources On Health Foods Among older adults: A Comparison of Internet and Paper Survey Results. According to the findings, people obtained information through friends, healthcare experts, or other media sources such as television, newspapers, and magazines. According to our findings, many elderly persons do not use the internet to obtain information about healthy diets. Adequate methods of informing consumers about healthy foods are required to limit the number of adverse events connected with healthy food use.

The elderly use the information they get for survival and decision-making. However, Guidarini (2012) stated in his paper "living large: The continuous need for large print materials, it was revealed that the elderly rely on large print materials to suit their information demands. After gathering the necessary information, the elderly would use it to make better decisions and gain a greater grasp of a particular area of life. Also, Ijiekhuamhen, Edewor, Emeka-Ukwu, and Egreajena (2016) studied elderly people and their information needs. The findings revealed that the elderly use information to understand their health better, 92% to get sources of finance, 81% to make better life decisions, 71% to know how to do things easily, 58% to understand a particular situation, 44% to know more about government policies, 41% to project future events, 28% others. Pourrazavi, Hashemiparast, Bazargan-Hejazi, Ullah, and Allahverdipour (2021) conducted a qualitative study to determine why elderly individuals look for health information online. The findings revealed four primary motivational themes: self-sufficiency, living a better life, accessing credible sources of health information, and accumulating health information. To achieve optimal health, older persons seek health information based on their needs and expectations. Medlock, Eslami, Askari, Arts, Sent, Rooij, and Abu-Hanna (2015) investigated the health Information–Seeking Behavior of Internet-Using Seniors. According to the data, the elderly utilize the Internet information to understand symptoms, prognosis, and treatment alternatives, whereas health professionals are mostly used for prescriptions, side effects, practical care information, and nutritional recommendations.

As regards the challenges in the accessibility and use of information by the elderly, Dynamics of health information-seeking behavior among older adults with very low incomes in Ghana: a qualitative study, by Agyemang-Duah, Arthur-Holmes, Peprah, Adei, and Peprah

(2020). Inadequate knowledge about the benefits of seeking health information, perceived poor attitude of healthcare providers, and communication issues were identified as factors preventing older adults with very low incomes from acquiring health information, according to the study. Barrett (2000) investigated the actual information needs of seniors in the United Kingdom. Several intriguing outcomes have been obtained. First, the elderly participants exhibited a general lack of awareness of the vast amount of information on practical assistance, services, health, benefits, and equipment available to them, as well as how to access it. Wick (2004) investigated the Information Seeking Behaviors of Older Adults. Respondents identified two major factors influencing their information seeking: difficulties related to declining physical abilities (loss of vision, loss of hearing) and poor communication with nursing home staff. The first issue made it difficult for some people to use the phone or receive information announced at meetings. The second issue reflected residents' reliance on staff at the second, high-care facility. Wungrath (2021) also researched the health information-seeking behavior of the elderly in Northern Thailand. The findings revealed that the elderly understudied did not know reliable sources, did not understand the information, or were unable to interpret the obtained information properly, they were also unable to access data sources. Chaiwchan and Nookhong (2018) investigated the elderly's health information behavior in the digital age. According to the findings, most elderly people lack information literacy and search techniques, which means they may receive insufficient information, spend time searching for information, or be required to use information from multiple sources. They are more restricted in their use of the Internet than other age groups.

Research Methodology

A survey research design was used for the study. The population of the study comprises elderly persons in the Ethiope East local government Area of Delta State, Nigeria. Ethiope East LGA is divided into three districts: Abraka, Agbon, and Isiokolo. Two hundred (200) Elderly persons were selected through systematic random sampling from each of the districts in Ethiope East (Abraka, Agbon, and Isiokolo) amounting to a sample size of six hundred (600) elderly persons used for the study. Questionnaires were used to elicit data from the respondent with the aid of three (3) research assistants who are proficient in the Urhobo language. The research assistants were trained by the researchers on how to collect data as well as how to approach respondents respectfully and cordially. The data collected via the questionnaire were analysed using the descriptive statistics method. Out of the 600 copies of the questionnaire distributed to the elderly respondents, the researchers were able to get the required information for analysis from 525 copies, thus, there was an 88% return rate.

Findings and Discussion

This section will show the demographic distribution of the respondents as well as the analysis of the key findings of the study.

Distribution of the Respondents by Sex

Table 1: Distribution of the Respondents by Sex

Sex of the Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Male	305	58%
Female	220	42%
Total	**525**	**100%**

According to Table 1, 58% of the elderly surveyed were male, while 42% were female. This Table depicts the sex ratio of the elderly participants in the survey.

Township Distribution of the Elderly Respondents

Table 2: Population of the Elderly Surveyed by Township

District of the Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Abraka Town	235	45%
Otoro-Agbon Town	160	30%
Ovu Town	130	25%
Total	**525**	**100%**

Table 2 shows that 45% of the elderly persons were surveyed from Abraka Town, 30% of the elderly persons were surveyed from Otoro-Agbon Town and 25% of the elderly persons were surveyed from Ovu Town

Key Findings of the Study

The information needs of the elderly persons in Ethiope East, Local Government Area

Table 3: Information needs of the Elderly Persons

Elderly Persons Information Needs	Frequency	Percentage
Health related information	525	100%
COVID-19 Pandemic Information	502	96%
News and Current Happenings	425	81%
Occupational related information	282	54%
Access to Finance/ Pensions	494	94%
Information on Life Decision	475	90%
Entertainment related information	202	38%
Government policies for the Elderly	402	77%

Transportation related information	225	43%
Information on the procedure for Performing Task	148	28%
Politics related information	395	75%

Table 3 shows that the information needs of the elderly persons are health-related information, COVID-19 pandemic information, access to finance/ pensions, information on life decisions, news and current happenings information, government policies for the elderly, politics related information, occupational related information, transportation-related information, entertainment-related information, and information on the procedure for performing tasks.

The sources of information available to the elderly persons

Table 4: Sources of information available to the elderly persons

Sources of information	Frequency	Percentage
Friends and Family Members	525	100%
Radio and Television	484	92%
Health Professionals	510	97%
Traditionalist	402	77%
Government Official Portals	128	24%
Traditional Rulers	458	87%
Internet/ Online Sources	102	19%
Library	98	18%
Town Hall Meetings	386	74%
Religious Worship Centers	282	54%
Age Grade Meetings	412	78%
Town Crier	194	37%

Table 4 revealed that the sources of information available to the elderly persons are friends and family members, health professionals, radio and television, age-grade meetings, traditionalist, town hall meetings, religious worship leaders, town crier, government official portals, internet/ online sources and library.

The uses the elderly persons put the information they get

Table 5: The Use the elderly persons put the information they get

Use of Information by the Elderly Persons	Frequency	Percentage
To make a better life decision	492	94%
To meet health needs	512	98%
To get finance sources	504	96%
To understand new trends	448	85%
To understand means of Transportation	312	59%
To understand the COVID-19 pandemic	508	97%
To get myself entertained	412	78%
To understand new occupational trends	246	47%
To know current news/ happenings around	268	51%
To understand government policies about the elderly	142	27%

The findings in Table 5 revealed that the elderly use the information they get to meet health needs, understand about COVID-19 pandemic, get financial sources, make better life decisions, understand new trends, keep themselves entertained, understand means of transportation, know current news/ happenings around them, to understand new occupational trends and to understand government policies about the elderly.

The challenges militating against the accessibility and use of information by the elderly person

Table 6: The challenges militating against the accessibility and use of information

Challenges in the access and use of Information	Frequency	Percentage
Poor attitude of healthcare providers	148	28%
Communication Barriers	518	98%
Inadequate finance	486	93%
Lack of Awareness of information sources	424	81%
Declining physical abilities due to aging	520	99%
Inadequate patience from friends and family members	508	97%
Inability to interpret obtained information properly	218	42%
Lack of information literacy/ search technique	344	65%
Lack of equity in material supply	128	24%

The findings in Table 6 revealed that the challenges that militate against the accessibility and use of information by the elderly persons are declining physical abilities due to aging, inadequate patience from friends and family members, inadequate finance, lack of awareness of information

sources, lack of information literacy/ search technique, inability to interpret obtained information properly, poor attitude of healthcare providers and lack of equity in material supply.

Discussion of Findings

The study assessed the information-seeking behaviour of elderly persons in Ethiope East, Delta State, Nigeria. The sex of the respondents that participated in the study revealed that there were more male elderly respondents than their female counterparts.

Information needs of the Elderly Persons in Ethiope East, Local Government Area

The finding has shown that the information needs of the elderly persons are mainly health-related, COVID-19 pandemic information, access to finance, life decision information, information on news and current happening, among others. This finding aligns with the study of Ijiekhuamhen, Edewor, Emeka-Ukwu, and Egreajena (2016) which revealed that the information needs of the elderly persons in Edo central are mainly health-related information, finance/ pension information, information required to make life decisions, among others.

The sources of information available to the elderly persons

The findings have clearly shown that the sources of information available to the elderly persons' understudy are friends and family members, health professionals, radio and television, age-grade meetings, traditionalist, town hall meetings, religious worship leaders, town crier, government official portals as well as other online sources. The finding agrees with the study of Patterson (2007) which shows that the elderly rely on family and friends as their preferred information source. The findings also agreed with the study of Kobayashi, Sato, Umegbak, and Chiba (2017) which revealed that the elderly preferred information source for healthy food are mainly from friends and healthcare experts, among others.

The use the elderly persons put the information they get

The finding has revealed that the elderly use the information they get to meet health needs, understand about COVID-19 pandemic, to get financial sources, to make better life decisions, to understand new trends, to keep themselves entertained, to understand means of transportation, to know current news/ happenings around them, to understand new occupational trends and to understand government policies about the elderly. This finding is in concordance with the study of Pourrazavi, Hashemiparast, Bazargan-Hejazi, Ullah, and Allahverdipour (2021) which revealed that the elderly use information for accessing credible sources of health information, and accumulating health information to achieve optimal health needs. The study disagrees with the study of Guidarini (2012) which revealed that the main use of information by elderly persons was to make better decisions and gain a greater grasp of a particular area of life.

The challenges militating against the accessibility and use of information by the elderly persons

The findings revealed that the challenges that militate against the accessibility and use of information by the elderly persons are declining physical abilities due to aging, inadequate patience from friends and family members, inadequate finance, lack of awareness of information sources, lack of information literacy/ search technique, inability to interpret obtained information properly, among others. This finding aligns with the study of Wick (2004) which revealed that the declining physical abilities (loss of vision, loss of hearing) and poor communication with nursing home staff were the challenges militating against the use of information by the elderly persons. The finding did not align with the study of Barrett (2000); Agyemang-Duah, Arthur-Holmes, Peprah, Adei, and Peprah (2020) which indicated inadequate knowledge about the benefits of seeking health information, lack of awareness of the vast amount of information on a particular topic and poor information literacy skills as the main factors militating against the access and use of information by the elderly.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Understanding the information-seeking behaviour of the elderly persons would enable librarians and other information professionals rendering services to the elderly persons to have sufficient information to serve them better as regards their information needs, preferred information sources, their use of information, and the barriers that could militate against their access and use of information. The present study has been able to reveal the information needs of the elderly persons in Ethiope East Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria. The older adults often require information about their health needs, COVID-19 Pandemic and how it can affect them as well as available sources of finance and much more. The elderly strive to meet their information needs by relying on a preferred information source available to them. From the study, it can be concluded that elderly persons rely mainly on friends and family members for their information needs, which is closely followed by health professionals and other mass media (radio and television), among others. The purpose of seeking information is mainly to get the required information and apply it in one area of life in terms of problem-solving. The elderly make use of information for their health needs, understand the COVID-19 pandemic and get sources of information to boost their purchasing power.

However, information-seeking activities often come with some itches that cause barriers to success in meeting information needs. Some of the barriers that could militate against the access and use of information by the elderly include health challenges due to aging, inadequate patience from friends and family members, inadequate finance, lack of awareness of information sources, lack of information literacy/ search technique, among others. The findings of this study can assist in formulating policies as well as designing a service plan for elderly persons.

From the findings of this study, the researchers recommend that:

i.   Libraries should channel their services to the elderly persons in the area of health information service, COVID-19 pandemic information service, and information on finance sources for the elderly, among others.

ii.   Friends and family members caring for elderly persons should try to be patient with them to serve them better in meeting their information needs.

iii.   Government should sponsor information literacy programmes for the elderly to boost their information search and use as they strive to meet their information needs.

iv.   Gratuity, retirement benefits, and other finance sources for the elderly should be provided for them to get the required finances to cater for their various needs.

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