



Influence of Source Credibility on The Utilization of Under-Two Years Children Nutrition Information Among Mothers in Delta State

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ABSTRACT

Infant nutrition is a key contributor to healthy growth and development; hence, proper dissemination and utilization of nutrition information is crucial. Studies have shown that adequate nutrition information enhances appropriate practices, reducing malnutrition and its consequences. However, previous studies have largely focused on general nutrition information, particularly food labels, with limited attention to how source credibility influences the use of such information in Delta State. This study therefore investigated the influence of source credibility on the utilization of infant nutrition information by mothers in Delta State, Nigeria. A mixed-methods, cross-sectional survey design was employed. A questionnaire was administered to 391 respondents, while in-depth interviews were conducted in six rural communities selected through a multistage sampling procedure. Mothers were chosen through systematic sampling at primary health centres in each community. Guided by Source Credibility Theory and the Elaboration Likelihood Model, the study utilized both a questionnaire and an interview guide for data collection. Findings reveal that credibility of information sources significantly influences utilization. Most mothers reported relying on health practitioners, whom they considered more knowledgeable, while many others trusted their mothers or mothers-in-law, whom they viewed as experienced in motherhood. The study concludes that although mothers access infant nutrition information from multiple sources, they prefer credible sources. It recommends that health organizations and healthcare workers collaborate with these trusted sources particularly healthcare providers and mothers to improve dissemination and enhance utilization of infant nutrition information.

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1. Introduction

Proper nutrition has been widely recognized by health practitioners and researchers as a fundamental requirement for healthy growth and proper development in children (UNICEF, 2013). Poor nutrition during the first 1,000 days of a child's life, particularly within the first two years, can result in irreversible consequences. Previous studies have shown that poorly nourished children are vulnerable to nutrition-related disorders such as stunting and other developmental challenges (NNHS, 2018; USAID, 2018). Consequently, issues affecting child health and well-being require serious attention, with nutrition regarded as one of the most important determinants of healthy development.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020), nutrition refers to the intake of food adequate for the dietary needs of the body. The organization further explains that good nutrition consists of a balanced diet combined with regular physical activity. WHO emphasizes that optimal nutrition during the first two years of life promotes healthy growth and cognitive development, making nutrition the cornerstone of healthy living, particularly for children whose mental and physical capacities are still developing.

In response to the growing concern about child malnutrition, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) introduced the Infant and Young Child Nutrition (IYCN) project in Nigeria in 2009 to support government efforts aimed at reducing malnutrition. In its 2011 country brief, USAID reported that it provided technical assistance to the Federal Ministry of Health (FMOH) in reviewing, updating, and disseminating nutrition policies and guidelines. This intervention complemented the National Policy on Infant and Young Child Feeding (NPIYCF) introduced by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2005. Among its objectives, the policy sought to promote appropriate nutrition information, create awareness regarding infant and young child feeding practices, and ensure that healthcare workers possess adequate knowledge to support optimal feeding practices. These efforts demonstrate that effective information dissemination is central to achieving improved nutrition among children. Scholars have similarly affirmed that adequate information can positively influence health-related attitudes and behaviours (Ordinioha & Abuwa, 2013).

Although access to information is important in promoting positive health behaviour, studies have shown that the credibility of information sources significantly affects how such information is received and utilized (Rudin et al., 2024). There appears to be a disconnect between the nutrition information available to mothers and the feeding patterns they adopt, a gap that has contributed to the persistence of malnutrition-related health problems (NDHS, 2013). WHO (2020) and Oyewole (2010, as cited in Oyewole & Amosu, 2012) explained that nutritious feeding patterns depend on several interrelated factors, including food quality, health status, quality of care, and environmental hygiene or sanitation. The absence of any of these factors can result in malnutrition.

Malnutrition has been associated with several diseases and developmental dysfunctions in both children and adults. In infants, malnutrition can cause physical, mental, and intellectual impairments while increasing the risks of morbidity and mortality (Aliyu et al., 2012; Babatunde et al., 2011; Smith & Haddad, 1999). Initiatives such as USAID's IYCN programme and the National Policy on Infant and Young Child Feeding were therefore established to minimize these adverse effects and improve child health outcomes. Despite these interventions, there remains a significant gap between the nutrition information available and its practical utilization by mothers. This raises concerns regarding whether mothers' perceptions of information sources influence their willingness to adopt nutrition recommendations. Even when mothers are aware of the importance of proper feeding practices, they may choose not to follow nutrition advice if the information source is perceived as unreliable. This situation is particularly concerning because mothers are primarily responsible for feeding under-two children and safeguarding their health and development. Studies on nutrition information sources have reported varying findings. Quaidoo et al. (2018) found that internet platforms were the most frequently used sources of nutrition information, while Kundu et al. (2020) identified family members as the most common source. Similarly, Fontenot (2012) reported that television, magazines, and the internet were widely used sources of nutrition information before health professionals, whereas Imonikebe (2009) found that many mothers in Delta State relied on health professionals for nutrition information. These varying findings raise important questions regarding the preferred sources of nutrition information among mothers in Delta State, their perceptions of these sources, and whether source credibility influences the utilization of nutrition information. Addressing these questions is essential for understanding how nutrition information can be effectively communicated and adopted among mothers of under-two children in Delta State.

Children under the age of five benefit significantly when their primary caregivers, particularly mothers, possess adequate nutritional knowledge (Forh et al., 2022). Such knowledge is often obtained from nutrition information made available through different communication channels. However, studies have shown that many mothers do not actively seek nutrition information, thereby creating a disconnect between the nutrition information available and the feeding practices adopted for their children (Imonikebe, 2009; Oyibo et al., 2011). In Nigeria, most nutrition-related studies have concentrated on the nutritional value of children's food, maternal feeding practices, and the prevalence and determinants of malnutrition (Babatunde et al., 2011; Eboh & Boye, 2006; Imonikebe, 2009; Oyibo et al., 2011). Similarly, research on nutrition information has focused mainly on general nutrition facts and food-label information (Cowburn & Stockley, 2005; Grunert et al., 2010; Sacks et al., 2013).

There is therefore a need to examine the specific sources of nutrition information available to mothers and the factors influencing their adoption of such information. This is particularly important because adequate