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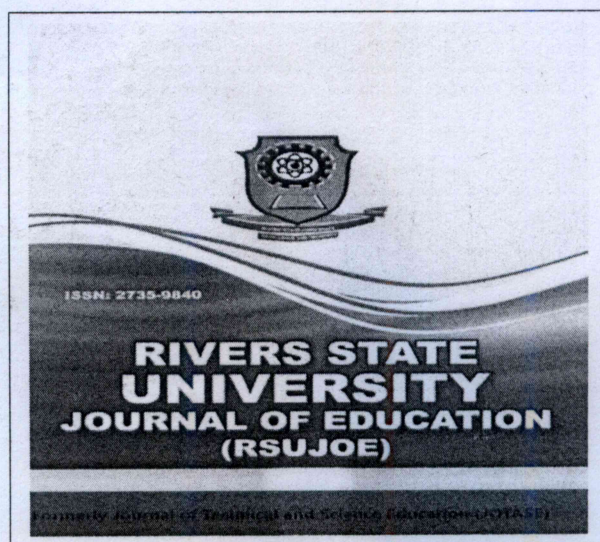
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Effect of Computer Games Instructional Strategy and Gender on Secondary School Students' Achievement in Data Processing in Ogidi Education Zone, Anambra State	1-10
John Bosco O.C. Okekeokosisi, Kaptani Yusuf Atiu & Nkechi T. Nchikwo	
Identification of Biology Students' Misconceptions in Genetics Among Secondary School Students in Nembe Local Government Area in Bayelsa State	11-19
Nelson-Ebimie, D. M., Adolphus, T., Omeodu, D. M. & Naade, N. B.	
Gender Influence as a determinant of Chemistry Teachers' Academic and Professional Competencies in Southwestern Nigeria	20-32
Ojobola, F. B., Ogundare A. A. & Babalola, F. E	
Evaluation of Lecturers' Competencies in the Use of Data Analysis Software for Quality Research in Faculties of Education in Rivers State Universities	33-40
Wagbara, Ebere (PhD) & Wosu, Uchechi Ngozi	
Teachers' Perception of the Effect of School Feeding Programme on Academic Performance of Rural Children in Odeda Local Government, Ogun State, Nigeria	41-45
Dada, O.E., Alarima, C.I., Adetarami, O., Isiaq, T.S. & Olagunju, O.A.	
Availability and Utilization of Educational Resources for Secondary Education in Ikwerre Local Government Area, Rivers State	46-55
Wordu, John Amaoge (PhD) & Botimi-Slaboh, Abosede S. (PhD)	
Physical School Environment and Students' Achievement: Lessons for Nigeria	56-66
Dr Patricia Iordye & Terfa Jato	
Influence of Social Media Usage on Self-Esteem of Teacher Trainees at the University of Benin, Edo State, Nigeria	67-75
Osunde, Yvonne Ododo (PhD) & Adeyemi, Florence Toyin (PhD)	
Perceived Effect of Teenage Pregnancy Among Female Senior Secondary School Students in Oredo Local Government Area of Edo State	76-82
Timbiri, E.B. & Egbochukuu, O.O. (Ph.D)	
Influence of Parenting Practices on Adolescent Risky Behaviours of Secondary School Students in Oyigbo Local Government Area, Rivers State	83-89
Dr. Angela Ebere Abaa	
Causes of Under-Nutrition Among Children Under Two Years as Expressed by Nursing Mothers in Moro Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria	90-97
Dr. Ibrahim Ologele	
Perceived Influence of Teachers' Classroom Organizational Skills on High School Students' Academic Performance in Anglophone Cameroon	98-105

Louis Okon Akpan (PhD)

Perceived Impact of Flooding on Sustainable Community Development in 106-118
Rivers State, Nigeria

Azunwo, Mamnenzenu Ukwanyi (PhD)

Information Management and Knowledge Culture as Determinants of Librarians' 119-129
Productivity in University Libraries in South-South, Nigeria

Monday Ogbomo, Israel Odede & Regina Ejiroghene Eniekebi

Effects of System Concept Mapping on Academic Performance and Retention in 130-137
Nervous System among Secondary School Students in Niger State, Nigeria

**Baba Kubo Gana, Ndako Mohammed Gana, Mohammed Kabir Buda, Rashidu
Mamman & Tanko Thomas**

Skill-Ecosystems Development and the Demand for New Business Education 138-152
Curriculum in Rivers State Owned Universities

Prof Margaret E. Akpomi & Oghenerukevwe Christian Ikpesu (PhD)

Causes of Under-Nutrition Among Children Under Two Years as Expressed by Nursing Mothers in Moro Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study examined causes of under-nutrition among children under two-years. A descriptive research design of survey type was used for this study. The study population comprised of nursing mothers with children under-two years in Moro Local Government Area of Kwara State, Nigeria. Multi-stage sampling technique was used to pick the respondents who participated in the study. Two hundred respondents were sampled for the study. Researchers developed a questionnaire validated by four experts in the related field and was used as an instrument for the study. The reliability of the instrument was confirmed through test-retest and a coefficient of 0.75 was obtained. Data collected for the study were analysed using inferential statistics of chi-square at a 0.05 alpha level of significance. The result showed that the economic status of mothers and their cultural practices contributed to the problem of under-nutrition while their educational status has no influence on children's nutrition in the study area. The study concluded that economic and cultural practices of nursing mothers with children under-two years responsible for under-nutrition while their educational level not responsible for under-nutrition. The researcher recommended amongs other that the government at all levels should develop measures that will reduce the price of foods and other household needs to enable mothers purchase nutritionally adequate diet that will protect the family against undernutrition.

Keywords: Causes, Under-nutrition, Children, Under two years, Nursing-mothers

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa with highest number of children in the region. Over half the population lives in poverty. Maternal, child and infant mortality rates remain among the world's highest (UNICEF, 2017). Jaulmes and Njoku (2006) and Joy-Telu (2018) observed that undernourished children have lower resistance to infection and are more likely to die from common childhood ailments such as malaria, diarrhoea diseases or respiratory infections. In Nigeria, it is estimated that malnutrition contributes to over 50% to mortality among children aged under-five years.

Food is any substance consumed to provide nutritional support for an organism. It is usually of plant or animal origin and contains essential nutrients, such as carbohydrate, fats, proteins, vitamins, or minerals. The foods taken in by organism is use by cells to provide energy, stimulate growth and maintain life. Food is described as an edible substance consumed to nourish the body. It supplies the nutrients required to form and maintain body tissues. Food quality is affected by so many factors, which include the processing methods, storage and level of exposure to environmental contaminants. (Fredrick et al., 2014). Food is a nutritive material which when taken furnishes the body with heat and energy, regulates body functions, promotes body growth, repairs body tissue and also assist in the regulation of body processes (Meg, 2016). Moronkola (2017) opined that nutrition is the food consumed and utilized by the body, people eat food to

live, grow, keep healthy and well, and get energy for work and play. Food is a substance either plant or animal in origin, taken to supply energy, produce growth and maintains life. Foods to human beings have much importance such as economic, health, social and psychological importance. Meg (2016) explained that nutrition is the process by which living organisms receive and make use of certain substances that are necessary to their life and good health. Nutrition is important to good health because we depend upon the nutrients in the food for developing and repairing body tissues and other substances and as regulates of vital body processes. Lucas and Gilles (2003) opined that malnutrition is an important public health problem that is caused by a deficient or excess intake of nutrients to requirements.

Undernutrition is the prevalent type of malnutrition in tropical developing countries. At most risks are the poor and disadvantaged, particularly women of reproductive age and young children. Patrica and Rhoda (1999) opined that good nutrition helps make people's bodies strong, fit and healthy, in short beautiful. Bodies are beautiful in different ways. Some people are tall, some short, some have dark skin, some are fair, some have curly hair, some have straight hair. Whatever your body is like, one thing is true, to be its most beautiful, it must be well-nourished. The best food for you then is the kind that supports normal growth and maintains strong muscles, sound bones, healthy skin and enough blood to cleanse and nourish all the parts of your body.

Nearly one-tenth of the world population-up to 811 million people went hungry in 2020. After remaining virtually unchanged for five years, world hunger increased last year. Further, it is projected that around 660 million people may still face hunger in 2030, 30 million more people than in a scenario in which the pandemic had not occurred, due to lasting effect of Covid-19 on global food security. The setback makes the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals for zero hunger and ending all forms of malnutrition more challenging (UNICEF, 2021). Oyerinde (2010) explained that in most developing countries of the world, the plight of the common man is pathetic. The problem of feeding adequately and properly is the bane to health. Because of poverty, ignorance and carelessness, a lot of life is lost to nutritional diseases. This feeding is acceptable to the extent that even when the local have access to natural foods and fresh items, his methods of handling, preparation and feeding is often faulty, unhygienic and inconsistent with dietary and health laws. The outcomes of this situation are the prevalence of malnutrition, vitamin deficiency diseases, mineral deficiency diseases and protein-energy malnutrition. UNICEF Unite for children (2016) explained that children from the poorest households are more likely to be stunted than children from wealthiest households. Fredrick et al., (2014) opined that nutrients are chemical substances contained in the food that is necessary to maintain life and allow growth, nutrients provide energy and contribute to the growth and regulate biological processes.

Cultural or religious practices may limit the range of foods people eat. People restrain from taking vegan due to culture will not consume any meat products which are high in protein, iron and vitamin B12. Edris (2004); Joy-Telu, (2018) explained that some of the consequences of malnutrition are down to religious and cultural practices which are inimical to good nutrition. For instance, discrimination in feeding among family

members, adults before children, adult males over adults females, practising heavy meals once, maybe twice, delay to start complementary food, refusing to give the child meat for fear of infection, feed children with leftover and contaminated foods. Anita et al., (2014) observed that disparities in malnutrition related to various background characteristics are significant in Nigeria, but are often more pronounced for stunting. Children from rural areas are almost twice more likely to be stunted than children from urban areas. A child with mother that has low or no education more likely to produce child with stunted growth four times more than a child whose mother has higher or at least secondary education.

National Council on health at her 53rd Meeting, in 2010, approved the bi-annual, nationwide, implementation of the Maternal New Born and Child Health Week (MNCHW), as one of the initiatives for the reduction of the unacceptably high numbers of illness and death among women, new-born and children in the country. The week-long activity is organized to deliver an integrated package of cost-effective, high-impact preventive and curative health interventions, including Immunization; Vitamin A supplementation; Long Lasting Insecticide Nets; Iron-Folate supplementation for pregnant women; De-worming of children; screening for Malnutrition; Birth registration; HIV Counseling and Testing (HCT) and Health promotion on Key Household Health Practices for improved lifestyle, including Hand-washing, Exclusive Breast Feeding, Appropriate Complementary Feeding, Focused Antenatal Care, New-born Care. This initiative would contribute to the reduction of the, unacceptably, high levels of maternal and child morbidity and mortality in Nigeria (National Primary Health Care Development Agency, 2017).

Individuals, at specific stages of their lives, are confronted with varying health challenges many of such which are the result of poor nutrition. The choice of diets undoubtedly plays a part in affecting the healthy lifestyle of individuals. The food contains both micro-nutrients and macro-nutrients including water. Inadequate intake of both micro and macronutrients, especially among infants and children, results in the problem of malnutrition. Undernutrition reduces immunity, physical activity and work productivity in adults, in children, it retards growth and psychological development. Undernourished mothers bear undernourished babies who often become stunted adults- thus perpetuating the undernutrition cycle. Undernutrition is a serious condition that affecting man which categorized as underlying, immediate and essential. Researcher observed that out of every ten children confirmed sufferings from malnutrition problem during Maternal New Born and Child Health Week (MNCHW) programme conducted in the study area between 8th and 12th June 2019 with the use of Mid-upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) strip, at least seven of them experienced undernutrition. This problem prompted researchers to investigate the causes of undernutrition among children in the study area. Therefore, the study objectives were to examine whether economic status, cultural practices and educational status of nursing mothers are causes of under-nutrition as perceived by nursing mothers in Moro LGA, Kwara State, Nigeria to provide functional suggestions that will assist in curb issues cause under-nutrition among under-two years children in the study area.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

1. economic status of nursing mothers will not significantly influence under-nutrition among children under two years in Moro Local Government Area;
2. cultural practices of nursing mothers will not significantly influence under-nutrition among children under two years in Moro Local Government Area;
3. educational status of nursing mothers will not significantly influence under-nutrition among children under two years in Moro Local Government Area;

METHODOLOGY

A descriptive research design of survey type was adopted for the study since the purpose of the study was to investigate the causes of undernutrition among children less than two years as perceived by nursing mothers in the study area. The study population made up of all the nursing mothers that have under- two years children in Moro Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria. The target population for the study were the nursing mothers attending routine immunization services programme in the study area. Multi-stage sampling technique was used for the study. At stage one, cluster sampling technique was used to group the routine immunization centres to three political senatorial districts. Stage two, purposive sampling technique was used to select one health centre from each district that had the highest number of registered nursing mothers for immunization and three health centres were selected (Bode Saadu, Arobadi and Shao health centres). Stage three, proportionate sampling procedure of 70% was used to select the respondents participated in the study based on the number of nursing mothers registered in each of the selected health facility. 84 nursing mothers selected in Bode Saadu health centre out of 120 registered, 56 nursing mothers selected from Arobadi out of 80 nursing mothers registered and 60 nursing mothers selected from Shao out 86 mothers registered and 200 respondents selected for the study. The instrument used for the study was a researcher-developed questionnaire that had been validated by four experts in related field. Test- retest approach was used to confirmed the reliability of the instrument. The instrument administered twice for three (3) weeks interval to the same set of nursing mothers at Afon health centre in Asa local government area, Kwara State, Nigeria. Pearson product-moment correlation was used to ascertain reliability of the instrument and result of 0.75r obtained. Descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentages was used to analyse the demographic data of the respondents while the hypotheses were analysed using inferential statistics of chi-square at 0.05 alpha level of significance.

RESULTS

The results obtained from the three hypotheses used for the study were shown on the tables below:

Hypothesis 1

Economic status of nursing mothers will not significantly influence under-nutrition among children under two years in Moro Local Government Area

Table 1

Chi-square analysis showing the influence of economic status of nursing mothers on under-nutrition of children under two years

S/N	Items	Agreed	Disagreed	Row total	Cal.chi-square	df	Table value	Decision
1.	Low income of the mothers per month contribute to children undernutrition	170 (85%)	30 (15%)	200	92.43	6	12.59	Ho ₁ rejected
2.	The high price of food in the market contributes to children undernutrition	160 (80%)	40 (20%)	200				
3.	Irregular payment of workers salary by government cause undernutrition among children	180 (90%)	20 (10%)	200				
Total		510	90	600				

The finding from the analysis in Table 1 shows that the calculated chi-square value was 92.43 while the table value was 12.59 with 6 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated chi-square value is greater than the table value, the hypothesis was rejected. This means that the economic status of nursing mothers influences under-nutrition among children under two years in Moro local government area of Kwara State, Nigeria.

Hypothesis 2

Cultural practices of nursing mothers will not significantly influence under-nutrition among children under two years in Moro Local Government Area

Table 2

Chi-square analysis showing the influence of cultural practices of nursing mothers on under-nutrition of children under two years

S/N	Items	Agreed	Disagreed	Row total	Cal.chi-square	df	Table value	Decision
1.	My culture influence the food selection for my family in my area	174 (87%)	26 (13%)	200	86.92	6	12.59	Ho ₂ rejected
2.	Cultural belief determine ways of preparing food in my area contribute to children undernutrition	150 (75%)	50 (25%)	200				
3.	Culture prohibits needed nutriment substances from the die	110 (55%)	90 (45%)	200				
Total		434	166	600				

The finding from the analysis in Table 2 shows that the calculated chi-square value was 86.92 while the table value was 12.59 with 6 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated value is greater than the table value, the hypothesis was rejected. This means that cultural practices of nursing mothers influences under-

nutrition among children under two-years in Moro local government area of Kwara State, Nigeria.

Hypothesis 3

Educational status of nursing mothers will not significantly influence undernutrition among children under two years in Moro Local Government Area.

Table 3

Chi-square Analysis Showing Influence of educational status of nursing mothers on causes of under-utrition

S/N	Items	Agreed	Disagreed	Row total	Cal.chi-square	df	Table value	Decision
1.	Level of mothers education contribute to the nutritional status of their children	5 (2.5%)	195 (97.5%)	200				
2.	Children from mothers with low or no education may experience the problem of undernutrition	10 (5%)	190 (95%)	200	10.62	6	12.59	Ho ₃ Accepted
3.	Illiterate mothers do not know how to use scarce resources to get quality food for the family	20 (10%)	180 (90%)	200				
	Total	35	565	600				

The finding from the analysis in table three shows that the calculated chi-square value was 10.62 while the table value was 12.59 with 6 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated chi-square value is less than the table value, the hypothesis was accepted. This means that the educational status of nursing mothers does not influence under-nutrition among children less than two years in Moro local government area of Kwara State, Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The result of the tested hypothesis one showed that the economic status of mothers influence undernutrition among children under two years in Moro Local Government Area. Some nursing mothers who participated in the study area were experiencing economic hardship with most of them realizing less than ₦20,000.00 as their monthly income. As a result, most parents could not purchase quality nutritional food for their families and consequently some of their children suffer from undernutrition which placed them at risk of developing various nutritional diseases. Poverty has consistently been shown to be associated with childhood morbidity and mortality. The poor are unable to afford curative care are unaware of the importance of preventive care and their children are at greater risk of developing various infections due to their high level of malnutrition. The result is consistent with the view of Oyerinde (2010) who pointed out that in most developing countries of the world, the plight of the common man is pathetic. The problem of feeding adequately and properly is the bane to health. Because of poverty, ignorance and carelessness, a lot of life is lost to nutritional diseases. The findings of this study is also consistent with the report of UNICEF Unite for children (2016) that children

from the poorest households are more likely to be stunted than children from wealthiest households.

The result obtained from hypothesis two revealed that cultural practices of nursing mothers influence under-nutrition among children less than two years in the study area. The observed that some children in the study area experience undernutrition due to their parents' submission to some cultural practices which prevent them from taking certain foods that are essentials for the rapid growth of children. Some families in the study area attached flimsy and unhealthy cultural reasons which discourage mothers and children from taking certain foods such as fish, snail, fruits and vegetables which are good for health. The finding of this study aligns with the assertion of Joy-Telu (2008) who opined that some of the consequences of malnutrition are religious and cultural practices which are inimical to good nutrition. For instance, discrimination in feeding among family members, adults before children, adult males over adults females, practising heavy meals once, maybe twice, delay to start complementary food, refusing to give the child meat for fear of infection, feed children with leftover and contaminated foods.

The result obtained from hypothesis three showed that the educational status of nursing mothers does not influence undernutrition among children less than two years in the study area. The Reseracher observed during the study that most of the participants in the study had less than secondary school education and do not seem to have any value of education on the improvement of nutritional status of their family members. The result of this finding disagreed with the view of Anita et al., (2014) who observed that disparities in malnutrition related to various background characteristics are significant in Nigeria, but are often more pronounced for stunting. Children from rural areas are almost twice more likely to be stunted than children from urban areas. A child with mother that has low or no education more likely to produce child with stunted growth four times more than a child whose mother has higher or at least secondary education.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed that the economic status of nursing mothers and their cultural practices influence under-nutrition among children under two years in the study area while their educational status does not influence under-nutrition of children as expressed by nursing mothers in the area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on results and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations were provided:

1. The government at all levels should develop measures that will reduce the price of foods and other household needs to enable mothers purchase nutritionally adequate diet that will protect their family against under-nutrition.
2. Health workers should organize sensitization programme through mass media to complement the health talk given to mothers in the clinic during the antenatal and postnatal programme to educate parents on the need to ignore unhealthy cultural practices that prevent them from taking certain foods which are good for health to protect their children against under-nutrition.

3. The government should give directive to educational authority on the need to include the value of nutrition to a school curriculum which will enable students of all disciplines have opportunity to understand the importance of taking balanced diets to protect their family members against under-nutrition.

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