

HEALTH LITERACY SKILLS AS A NATIONAL REFORMATION AGENDA FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH CONDITIONS IN AWGU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ENUGU STATE

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Abstract

This study investigated the extent health literacy skills can improve women's health condition in Awgu Local Government Area, Enugu State. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. Two research questions guided the study. The population of the study consists of 774 women organization in Awgu local government. A sample of 229 women using proportionate stratified random sampling technique was selected for the study. Health Literacy Skills National Reformation Agenda for Women's Health Conditions Questionnaire (HLSNRAWHCQ) was used for data collection. The instrument was face validated by three experts. The reliability co-efficient of 0.78 and 0.86 were obtained using Kendalls co-efficient of concordance. Data collected were analyzed using weighted mean. Findings of the study revealed among other things that health literacy skill components of functional skill and digital skills to a great extent improved women's health condition in Awgu Local Government Area, Enugu State. These findings were exhaustively discussed and it was recommended among others that Government and Non-Governmental Organizations should provide women in the communities with functional literacy and academic empowerment programmes that would further educate the women to be self-reliant and assertive and also National gender policy should be refined and put to practice so that women will have unlimited access to health literacy and health services

Keywords: health literacy, reformation, health condition

Introduction

Health is considered an essential component of global development. Health literacy is the ability to obtain, read, understand, and use healthcare information in order to make appropriate health decisions and follow instructions for treatment. Health literacy has become an integral component of human life, and it plays a significant role in ensuring safety from a variety of deadly diseases and also improves the health conditions of the people especially the women. It is a crucial determinant of health promotion in the contemporary era with the rapid change of healthcare technologies. On this note, World Health Organization, (2016) stated that health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity. Health involves a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction with our own lives, system of values, self-confidence and self-esteem, self-awareness and presence, positive emotions, compassion and willingness to help and support others, responsibility and contribution to the common good, and successful management of everyday life problems and demands as well as social stress (Gajović & Svalastog, 2016). Furthermore, Donev (2019) noted that health is experienced and evaluated according to what people find reasonable to expect, given their age, medical conditions, and social situation. In this way, health is not necessarily freedom from

disease or loss of functional abilities. Other positive values in life can compensate for different types of losses. The perception of health depends on who you are as a person.

Furthermore, health literacy plays a crucial role in empowering individuals to make informed decisions about their health and well-being. Notably, Heijmans (2019) affirmed that health literacy enables people to improve their knowledge and competence to make health care decisions and take control of their health. It is the skill to search, find, understand, and evaluate health information and employ this information to make diagnoses or appropriate health-based decisions (Glomjal & Chachvarat, 2020). Women, in particular, face unique health challenges throughout their lives, and having adequate health literacy skills can significantly improve their overall health outcomes (Silva & Santos, 2021). In this knowledge boom, people are expected to interpret their disease, determine symptoms and make decisions on their health. The decisions are determined by health literacy level (Balcik, Taskaya & Sahin, 2017). Today, there are various causes for importance of health literacy such as rising chronic disease such as cancer, negatively health results, health care costs and demand of health knowledge. Especially, women is affected due to the fact that most of them lack literacy skills worldwide (Yılmazel & Cetinkaya, 2016). Implicitly, by developing and utilizing these skills, women can take an active role in managing their health and well-being.

Understanding the health literacy level of any population is the best measure to reduce the spread of diseases and virus among the population. The rate at which illness affects overall women has been on steady increase (Speros, 2015). The effect of health conditions among women in the community has led to reduction in productivity and fear of the unknown. Also, the social, physical, health, emotional and economic life of the people in Awgu Local Government has been greatly affected with illness and infections which has gripped the health conditions of women leading to low achievement of the community goals. The situation has been made worse because of low awareness on health literacy, poor health care services, sensitization on effects and remedy to this health issues. Furthermore, Soetan (2016), affirmed that the prevailing limited health literacy in the Nigerian society is central to patient safety, medication errors including appreciation for the role of health care service providers and patronage of quacks. He identified the adults who grapple with chronic age-related illness, children, especially with illiterate parents, people living in rural areas and the illiterate to be the most vulnerable groups. However, to attain optimal health, and also help improve women conditions health literacy skills is imperative (Blackey, 2015). Hence, to improve health conditions of women, some health literacy skills were needed which include; functional skills and digital skills among others.

Functional skills has been described as a fundamental requirement for effective engagement of patients with health related issues in decision making. It is the application of basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy necessary to function effectively in a health context. Functional health skills promote, protect and also prevent wide range of diseases spread through understanding, interpreting, and analyzing health information. (Bohlman, 2014). It is the degree to which an individual have the capacity to obtain, process and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions. Functional skills is the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions. Baker (2016) confirmed that functional health literacy skills has to do with the constellation of skills, including the ability to perform basic reading and numerical tasks required to function in the health care environment. Patients with adequate health literacy can read, understand and act on health information

(Freedman, Bess, Tucker & Boyd, 2016). Functional skills are likely to impact how older adults navigate the health care system even when loss and other challenges exist in their lives. Furthermore, Jones (2019) revealed that functional skill is a kind of training for the aged populace which requires practical instruction and immediate application. Such training is hypothesized to increase elders' skills and confidence regarding interactions with healthcare providers. For example, greater confidence in talking with health care professionals can increase the likelihood that health care instructions will be understood and followed, or alternatively, questioned, which might lead to a different way for the provider to educate. Furthermore, Resnick, Luisi and Vogel (2018) opined that functional health literacy skill approach treats older adults with respect and potentially empowers them.

To achieve this, it is necessary to master basic reading, writing, numeracy, communication, risk recognition, critical sense for the analysis of conflicting information and decision-making concerning health. This implies that functional health literacy provides a unique contribution to these aspects of patients' control that is not covered and it can help in improving women's health condition. Similarly, Sarah, Ignatius and Chinagorum (2018) affirmed that functional health literacy plays a crucial role in improving women's health condition in several ways like helping women comprehend and make sense of medical information and instructions provided by healthcare professionals. This ensures that they understand their health conditions, treatment options, medication instructions, and preventive measures. Women with functional health literacy are better equipped to navigate the healthcare system, understand health insurance coverage, and access appropriate healthcare services. This empowers them to seek timely and appropriate care, leading to improved health outcomes.

Interestingly, digital skills has to do with the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) for health for example, treat patients, track diseases and monitor public health issues (Robbin & Dunn 2018). There is great enthusiasm over the use of emerging interactive health information technologies often referred to as e-Health, and these potential technologies have to improve the quality, capacity, and efficiency of the health care system. Digital health literacy systems can also improve clinical decision making and adherence to clinical guidelines, provide reminder systems for patients and clinicians, thereby improving compliance with preventive service protocols, provide more immediate access to laboratory and radiology results; and, when integrated with clinical decision support systems, help to prevent many errors and adverse events (Institute of Medicine [IOM], 2018).

Digital skills refer ability of individuals to understand, use digital and online resources to their health knowledge, make informed health decisions, engage in-related activities the ability to use health websites search for information online, and critically evaluate the quality health information. Kim (2015) describes digital health literacy as the skills necessary to successfully navigate and use digital or electronic health information and patient resources. This approach focuses on educating individuals about using computers and other mobile devices to access medical information and interact with healthcare teams. This includes, for example, using electronic patient portals and technology for tele-health visits. Shan, Ding, Plante, and Martin (2019) revealed that mobile health users are more likely to report intentions to improve diet, exercise, and lose weight, further adding to the need to increase women's access and use of digital health tools. This includes being able to navigate health-related websites understand medical terminology critically analyze the reliability and credibility of health information and make informed decisions about one's health based on the information obtained (Soellner, 2014).

Digital health literacy also encompasses the ability to utilize health apps wearable devices, tele-health services and other digital tools for monitoring and improving health outcomes (Norman, 2018).

In western countries, according to Dr Natasha Azzopardi Muscat, WHO/Europe's Director of Country Policies and Health Systems in World Health Organization report (2024), digital health literacy empowers women to understand and manage their health conditions effectively. Women can access resources from online communities and support groups allowing them to gain knowledge about their conditions and connect with others facing similar challenges. Digital health tools like wearable devices mobile apps and online platforms enable women to monitor and track their health data such as physical activity, sleep patterns and menstrual cycles. Digital skills support women in engaging in preventive care practices such as scheduling regular check-ups and screenings (Uju, 2014). In the same vein, Adedinsewo, Pollak, Phillips, Smith, Svatikova, Hayes, Mulvagh, Norris, Roger, Noseworthy, Yao and Carter (2022) revealed that Apps and online platforms provide reminders and educational resources encouraging women to prioritize their health and wellbeing. It assist women in managing their medications including managing their medications including reminders for dosage and refill schedules. This can help improve medication adherence, reduce errors and ensure proper treatment among women. In other words, overhauling and reforming some of our outdated policies on healthcare systems would improve the overall wellness of people especially women.

National reformation generally refers to a comprehensive overhaul or transformation of various aspects of a nation's systems or structures, often with the goal of addressing systemic issues, improving efficiency, promoting progress, and meeting the evolving needs of society. In the context of health, a national reformation specifically focuses on reforming and improving the healthcare system and related policies within a country. Promoting health literacy skills as part of a national reformation for women's health conditions is an excellent approach to improving overall wellness and reducing health disparities (Manganello, 2018). The reformation in health has to include the implementation of comprehensive educational programs targeting women of all ages, starting from schools and continuing through adulthood (Manganello, 2018). These programs should focus on building foundational health literacy skills, including understanding medical terminology, interpreting health information, and navigating the healthcare system.

In Nigeria, most adults especially women, lack basic health literacy skills that will enable them to respond to health issues. Health literacy may not be related to years of education or general reading ability. A person who functions at home or work may have marginal or inadequate literacy in a health care environment (Jaadzade, Heydarabad & Sharifirad, 2016). During the past decade, the magnitude and consequences of low health literacy on the health of women have received considerable attention, contributing to a new perspective on the broader and more complicated relationship between education and health (Onotai, 2018). Limited health literacy has been linked to problem with the use of preventive services, delayed diagnoses, understanding of one's medical condition, adherence to medical instructions, and self-management skills. Despite all the technologies around us, there has been cases of health challenges in the livelihood of women, and these has led to mortality increase and spread of diseases and infections. Low health literacy in women has remained a major problem in Nigeria among all strata of the population resulting in high disease burden on the masses, which sabotages developmental efforts of various governments with its attendant multiplier effects. This has resulted in the high rate of death among women, especially in Awgu local government

area with majority of women under the prevalence of superstitious beliefs and practices that are harmful to their health.

Statement of the Problem

Health literacy is important issue in community health due to the effects on many people especially the women. Women health issues and challenges has been a major phenomenon as such has raised a lot of concern to various government and non-governmental agencies including the community leaders of the world. This health conditions possess a whole lot of threat to the lives and health of women. In Awgu Local Government Area, women has always been battling with the issue of health challenges as it has led to increase in mortality rate among women due to health illiteracy, taking of over-dose and expired drugs among others, spread of disease from mother to child, crisis during labour and economic turn down among others. The need to improve the health conditions of women in Awgu Local Government Area is paramount, hence, the rationale for this study is to access the extent of health literacy skills for improvement of women health conditions in Awgu Local Government Area of Enugu State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent has functional skills improved health condition of women in Awgu L.G.A?
2. To what extent has digital skills improved health condition of women in Awgu L.G.A?

Method

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. The design was considered appropriate for this study because according to Nworgu (2015), a descriptive survey design seeks to document and describe what exists or the present status of existence or absence of what is being investigated. It was used in this study to describe health literacy skills as a national reformation agenda as it relates to improving women's health conditions. A-10item structured questionnaire titled: Health Literacy Skills National Reformation Agenda for Women's Health Conditions Questionnaire (HLSNRAWHCQ) was used as instrument for data collection. The questionnaire for data collection was designed on a four point rating scale of very high extent (4-points), high extent (3-points), low extent (2-points) and very low extent (1-point) respectively. The population of the study consisted of 774 women of women organization in Awgu local government.

The sample was 229 respondents that is, 30 percent of women from different organization in Awgu local government area of Enugu state of women from seven women organizations drawn through proportionate stratified random sampling technique. The instrument was face validated by three (3) experts one from the Department of Science Education and two(2) from the Department of Adult Education and Extra-Mural Studies, all from the faculty of Education, University of Nigeria Nsukka. The reliability coefficient of 0.78 and 0.86 were obtained indicating that the instrument was reliable for the study. Results obtained were presented in tables based on the research questions.

Results

Research Question one: To what extent can functional skills improve health conditions of women in Awgu Local Government Area of Enugu state?

Table 1: Mean response of the respondents on the extent of which functional skills has improved women's health condition.

S / N	ITEMS STATEMENT	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	NO OF RESP.	EX	MEA N	DECISION RULE
1	Functional skills provides basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy necessary to function effectively in health context.	92	67	58	12	229	697	3.04	Accepted
2	Functional skills helps women to comprehend and make sense of medical information and instructions provided by healthcare providers	89	55	63	22	229	669	2.92	Accepted
3	It enable women to understand the importance of preventive measures such as regular screening, vaccination and life modifications.	103	82	29	15	229	731	3.19	Accepted
4	Women with functional skills are better equipped to navigate the healthcare system, understand health insurance coverage, and access appropriate healthcare services.	46	103	45	35	229	618	2.69	Accepted
5	functional skills empowers women to take control of their own health, make informed decisions, and actively engage in their healthcare journey, leading to improved health outcomes and overall well-being.	126	78	19	6	229	782	3.41	Accepted

Information in Table 1 revealed that items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 showed that functional skills was perceived by women to high extent as capable of improving health condition of women in Awgu LGA, Enugu State. Based on the details in table 1, providing basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy necessary to function effectively in health context, comprehend and make sense of medical information and instructions provided by healthcare providers, understand the

importance of preventive measures such as regular screening, vaccination and life modifications, understand health insurance coverage, and access appropriate healthcare services and empowers women to take control of their health, make informed decisions and actively engage in their healthcare journey constitute was of improving health conditions of women in Awgu LGA.

Research Question Two: To what extent has digital skills improved health condition of women in Awgu Local Government Area of Enugu state?

Table 2: Mean responses of the respondents on the extent to which digital skills has improved women health conditions

S/N	ITEM STATEMENT	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	NO OF RESP	EX	MEAN	DECISION RULE
6	Digital health tools like mobile apps and online platforms enables women to track health data such as physical activity and menstrual cycle.	132	35	42	20	229	737	3.21	Accepted
7	It supports women in engaging in preventive care practices such as; scheduling regular check-up and screening.	48	70	79	32	229	592	2.58	Accepted
8	Digital health enable women to find credible source of information about specific health issues	64	36	86	43	229	579	2.52	Accepted
9	Digital skills enable women to find and participate in online and support forum that focused on women's health issues.	106	30	65	28	229	672	2.93	Accepted
10	Digital skills provides emotional support, knowledge sharing and an opportunity to connect with others who are experiencing similar conditions.	54	35	136	4	229	597	2.60	Accepted

Table 2 presents the mean ratings on the extent digital skills component of health literacy skills has improved women health condition in Awgu LGA, Enugu State. Items 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 were accepted to high extent above the cut off point of 2.50 criterion mean on the four point scale as indicated in the questionnaire with the grand total mean of 2.80. Details in table 2 revealed that digital skills needed to improve women's health condition include using digital health tools like mobile apps and online platforms to track health data such as physical activity and menstrual cycle, supports women in engaging in preventive care practices such as scheduling regular check-up and screening, find credible source of information about specific health issues, participate in online and support forum that focused on women's health issues and provides

emotional support, knowledge sharing and opportunity to connect with others who are experiencing similar conditions. This inference therefore is that the digital skill component of health literacy skill enhances the improvement of women's health condition in Awgu LGA, Enugu State.

Discussions of Findings

The findings with respect to research question 1 revealed that functional skill as a component of health literacy skill to a great extent can improve the health conditions of women in Awgu LGA of Enugu state. The findings indicate that a functional skill provides basic skill of reading, writing and numeracy necessary to function effectively in health context. This was supported by Jones (2019), that functional skills is an education for aged population, which requires practical instructions and immediate application. It enables women to comprehend and make sense of medical information and instructions provided by healthcare professionals. It also empowers women with different health conditions to take proactive steps to maintain and take control of their own health, make an informed decisions and actively engage in their healthcare journey to improve their health conditions.

Findings with respect to research question 2 also revealed that digital skill as a component of health literacy skill to a great extent can improve the health conditions of women. The findings indicate that digital skills enable women to participate in online and support forum that focused on women's health issues and provides emotional support, knowledge sharing and opportunity to connect with others who are experiencing similar conditions. Kim (2015) affirmed that digital skills educate individuals about using computers and other mobile devices to access medical information and interact with healthcare teams. This is also true because digital health tools like wearable devices, mobile apps and online platforms enable women to monitor and track their health data such as physical activity sleep patterns and menstrual cycles.

Conclusion

The study had x-rayed the various ways health literacy as a national reformation agenda can improve women's health condition in Awgu LGA, Enugu State. The findings have shown that health literacy as a national reformation agenda can improve women's health condition. Thus, the neglect of health literacy in Nigeria for improving the health status and conditions of women towards maintaining a healthy living is an obstacle to economic growth, national reformation and development.

Recommendations

In view of the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- The National gender policy should be refined and put to practice so that women will have unlimited access to health literacy and health services.
- Government and other Non-Governmental Organizations should provide women in the communities with functional literacy programmes that would empower and further educate the women to be self-reliant and assertive.
- Developed health education programmes that address the specific health needs women, such as reproductive health, maternal and child health, nutrition, mental health, and

chronic disease prevention through utilization of digital tools and technologies such as; mobile health applications, websites, and SMS services. These programs should be delivered in community settings, such as local clinics, community centers, and schools.

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