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**Article**

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**HEALTH INFORMATION NEEDS OF FRESH STUDENTS IN A  
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**Abstract**

*A survey of 460 students of Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Owerri, in I mo State, randomly selected, was carried out with a view to identifying their health information needs. The study was carried out between April and July 2006. A structured questionnaire was designed and used for data collection. The results of the survey showed that the students health information needs were on reproductive health, emotional health, personal hygiene and mental health promotion. Most of the respondents (92.4%) required information on reproductive health such as Sexually Transmitted diseases (STD), abortion, unwanted pregnancy, menstruation and infertility. Their main sources of information were hospitals/private clinics, parents and friends. Lack of awareness, of current information materials and Information Communications Technology (ICT) facilities in the library and the attitude of library staff and health workers of the College health centre were among the constraints to effective health information delivery. Suggestions for the improvement of health information services were proffered.*

**Introduction**

The concept of health information is not a new phenomenon. Human beings had from time suffered from one ailment or another which compelled them to seek for medical treatment or advice. However, the increasing number of health related problems in Nigeria today, warrants urgent and special attention.

The number of HIV/AIDS victims after the first case was diagnosed in Nigeria in 1986 is alarming. According to UNAIDS (2005) the estimated number of HIV/AIDS cases in Nigeria had risen from approximately 10 million in 1990 to 40.8 million in 2005 of which 25.8 million people (64%) are in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Students by their nature are curious and gullible and apparently, as Ogundale (2004) has observed indulge in unhealthy lifestyles and sexual behaviours. Okonoua (2000) has

pointed out that with the increasing population of adolescents in Africa, there are mounting social and reproductive health problems, which have shown no visible sign of abating except students are well informed, and healthy attitudes and positive behaviours inculcated in them. Knowledge about health information needs of students in academic institutions will benefit the management of these institutions. It will also enable their libraries to improve on their services.

## **Literature Review**

There have been studies about information needs of various interest groups reported in library and information science literature. However, studies on health information needs of students in tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria appear to be non-existent.

Kirkpatrick (1987) cited by Ajayi and Akinniyi (2004) traced the existence of consumer health information to the time fever was recognized by the species as an ailment. Ajayi and Akinniyi (2004) investigated the accessibility of health information to primary health care workers in some selected local government areas of Osun State and found that the workers needed information on EPI/ORT, maternal and child health, HIV/AIDS, SARS, telemedicine, education, training programmes and information on government activities.

Some studies like those by Osiobe (1980), Ehikhamenor and Njongmeta (1998), Moahi (1999) and Oduwole (2000) focused on specific health information needs of the target group being investigated and their sources of information.

In the study of health information needs of the visually impaired in urban centers in Oyo State, Emiola and Eguavoen (2001) found that the visually impaired needed different types of health information for their well being. Ottiong and Nwalo (2001) examined information services for reproductive health of female students in selected secondary schools in Calabar. The study highlighted the types, sources and information seeking behaviour of the female students. In the same vein, Odusanya and Bankole (2006), surveyed students in Ogun State for their knowledge attitudes towards HIV/AIDS. The study identified radio, bill boards/posters and television as their main sources of information for AIDS awareness.

## **Objectives of the Study**

The study sought to:

1. Identify the health related problems for which the students have sought or received health information.
2. Examine the sources of their health information.
3. Determine the accessibility of health information to the students.

### Research Questions

What is the health information needs of the students?

What are the sources of health information for the respondents?

To what extent are the health information sources accessible to the students?

What are the students' constraints in obtaining health information?

### Methodology

The study employed survey research design. The population for the study comprises all the first year N.C.E. and Degree students of Alvan Ikoku College of Education Owerri, admitted in 2005/2006 session, totalling 4,700. From this population, a sample of 470 students (320 females and 150 males) were randomly selected from the five schools in the College, using balloting as follows: Agriculture and Vocational Studies 80, Arts 35, Education 30, Natural Sciences 105 and Social Sciences 200. Their ages range between 18 and 24 years.

**Table 1: Distribution of respondents by Schools**

SCHOOL	NCE		DEGREE		TOTAL NO. OF STUDENTS	SAMPLE SIZE
	No.	Sample	No.	Sample		
Agric/Voc. Studies	230	22	580	58	810	80
Arts	130	13	416	42	546	55
Education	140	14	164	16	304	30
Natural Sciences	255	25	792	80	1047	105
Social Sciences	445	45	1548	155	1993	200
Total	1200	110	3500	351	4700	470

Table 1 indicates a fair representation of each of the five schools in the college.

### Instrumentation

A structured questionnaire made up of five parts was designed and used to obtain information from the respondents. The first part deals with the bio-data of the

respondents. The second part consisted of structured items which elicited data on personal hygiene, mental health, emotional health, such as anxiety, depression, stress, sleeplessness and reproductive health information needs of the respondents such as, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STD), abortion, unwanted pregnancy, menstruation, use of contraceptives, marriage, motherhood, circumcision and sex education. Part three and four sought information on sources and accessibility of health information. The last part sought information on respondents' constraint in obtaining health information. The respondents were asked to indicate more than one response as the case may be.

Altogether, 470 copies of the questionnaire were distributed. After scrutiny, 460 copies were found usable and incorporated in this study, representing 97%. The data collected were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages.

A ranked list of responses to health information needs of the respondents is presented in Table 2 below:

**Table 2: Ranked list of Health Information Needs of the Respondents**

Health information needs	Fi	Percentage
Reproductive health	425	92.4
Emotional health	218	47.4
Personal hygiene	196	42.6
Mental health promotion	11	2.3

The findings in table 2 reveal that most of the respondents (92.4%) required information on reproductive health issues such as abortion, unwanted pregnancy, Sexually Transmitted Infections (especially HIV/AIDS), marriage, motherhood and use of contraceptives. On the other hand, 47.4% of the respondents indicated that they needed information on emotional health problems while 42.6% stated that they needed information on personal hygiene. Only 2.3% indicated that they needed information on mental health promotion.

**Table 3: Ranked List of Respondents' Sources of Health Information**

Source	Fi	Percentage
Hospitals/private clinics	330	71.7
Parents	318	69.1
Friends	284	61.7
Library	278	60.4
Radio	250	54.3

Periodical (Journals, Magazines, Newspapers)	190	42.3
Television	144	31.3
Internet searching	132	28.7
College Councillng centre	105	22.8
College Health centre	57	12.4
Bill board/posters	48	10.3
Lectures	35	7.6

Most of the respondents (71.7% and (69.1) indicated that their major sources of health information were hospitals/private clinics and parents respectively. Friends ranked third (61.7%) followed closely by the library (60.4%). Radio was cited by 54.3% of the respondents as an important source for obtaining health information. Periodicals, such as, journals, magazines and newspapers were indicated by 41.3%. Other sources of health information indicated include, Television \*31.3%), Internet searching (28.7%), College Counselling centre (22.8%), college Health centre (12.4%), bill boards/posters (10.3%) and lecturers (7.6%).

Table 4: Respondents Access to Health Information

<b>Response</b>	<b>Fi</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Accessible	243	52.8
Fairly accessible	102	26.5
Not accessible	95	20.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>460</b>	<b>100</b>

The results in Table 4 showed that a considerable proportion of the respondents (52.8%) had access to health information. However, 26.5% of the respondents indicated that health information was fairly accessible to them while 20.7% had no access at all.

Table 5: Constraints in Obtaining Health Information

<b>Constraints</b>	<b>Fi</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Unaware of sources of health information	415	90.2
Inadequate current health information materials in the library	403	87.6
Lack of ICT facilities in the library	232	50.4
Attitude of health workers	85	18.5
Unhelpful library staff	54	11.7

The responses presented in table 5 revealed that: lack of awareness of sources of health information constituted the major constraints with 90.2% followed by inadequate current health information materials in the library (87.6%). Other constraints cited were, lack of Information Communications Technology facility in the library (50.4%), attitude of health workers (918.5%) and unhelpful library staff.

## **Discussion**

The study found that the respondents relied on hospitals/private clinics and parents as their major sources of health information. This result corroborates Emiola and Eguavoen (2001) whose study revealed that most of the respondents sought and received their health information in hospitals. The finding is also in agreement with Ottong and Nwalo (2001) who had earlier found that students in secondary schools obtained most of their health information from the indexing and abstracting services offered by the library on different subject areas. Other sources, which the respondents found relevant, were radio, periodicals, television and Internet searching. It is not surprising that the respondents rated the College health centre and counseling centre low. The reason is clear. The respondents explained that they were afraid that their ailment might be disclosed to fellow students from those sources.

The sources of health information were seen by a majority of the respondents as useful and accessible. This is particularly true as according to them the College library, health centre and counseling centre are centrally located on the campus.

The major constraints in obtaining health information were lack of awareness of health information, inadequate current health information materials, and lack of information Communications Technology based system in the library. The attitude of the library staff and health workers were also cited as a constraint. All these are worth noting for improvement in library and health services.

## **Conclusion**

Fresh students in Alvan Ikoku College of Education Owerri, as can be seen in this study, have need for health information to solve their emotional, mental and reproductive health problems. Although, the respondents have indicated their major sources of health information as hospitals, private clinics and parents, they do not, however, patronize these sources until they are faced with serious health problems which they cannot contend with or solve. The students lack appropriate knowledge about health and where to obtain timely information or advice. There was also the

problem of lack of current health information materials and Information Communications Technology facility in the College Library.

### **Recommendations**

- There is need for adequate intervention strategies such as the provision of funds to the College Library to procure enlightenment and information materials on health.
- Modern Information Communications Technology (ICT) facility should also be provided in the library to enhance easy access to health information.
- Teaching of healthy living as part of the General Studies programme for fresh students should be intensified.
- Health information resource centre should be set up in the College Library.
- The librarians should collaborate with health experts/providers and non-governmental organizations to obtain information on health and related problems, which they could repackage and make available to students.

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