



ROLE OF ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN PROMOTING EXCLUSIVE BREASTFEEDING AMONG RURAL WOMEN IN KHANA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to Investigate the Role of Adult Education Programmes in Promoting Exclusive Breastfeeding among Rural Women in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State. It adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised 145,609 members of the 73 registered Women Community Based Associations in the Local Government Area. Clustered sampling technique was used to select a sample of 400 from the population. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire with an overall reliability coefficient of 0.87 obtained through Cronbach Alpha. Three research questions were posed. Data gathered were analysed using frequency count and mean. The result showed that there existed some level of negative perception of exclusive breastfeeding among the women. Furthermore, adult literacy and health literacy were found to promote exclusive breastfeeding among women. Based on the result, it was recommended, amongst others, that awareness programmes such as market campaigns, church visitations, and community visits should be organized by primary health providers to educate rural women on exclusive breastfeeding in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State.

KEYWORDS: Adult Education, Adult Education Programmes, Exclusive Breast Feeding, Rural Women.

INTRODUCTION

Breastfeeding is a public health practice that is critical for the survival of infants and young children. It plays a vital role in promoting the health and well-being of both infants and mothers (Ogundare, Babatola, Omoyajowo, Ajite, Adeniyi, Fatunla & Olatunya, 2023). It provides essential nutrients and antibodies that contribute to the baby's optimal growth and development (Taren & Lutter, 2017). Breast milk contains antibodies that help to protect infants from infections and diseases, reducing the risk of illnesses. According to Scherbaum and Srour (2016) breastfeeding has an important role in the prevention of different forms of childhood malnutrition, including wasting, stunting, over and underweight, micronutrient deficiencies. Scherbaum and Srour (2016) added that breastfeeding promotion and support are important to prevent childhood morbidity and mortality as well as promotion of cognitive development in infants.

Research shows that breastfeeding has significant health benefits for mothers. It assists the uterus to return to its pre-pregnant state faster, can help women to lose weight after baby's birth, reduces the risk of ovarian cancer and pre-menopausal breast cancer, reduces the risk of osteoporosis and reduces the risk of mothers with gestational diabetes developing to Type 2 diabetes (Queensland health in Bhatti, Usman, Ali, Satti, & Bakhtawar, 2014)

Several population studies have been conducted, the majority of which show a positive cognitive development in breastfed individuals. Not only breastfeeding but also the duration of breastfeeding has been reported to influence development in infants. A study by Lee, Park, Ha, Hong, Ha, Park and Kim (2016) showed that increasing duration of breastfeeding is associated with higher scores on measures of cognitive ability. Kim and Choi (2020) reported a positive relation between breastfeeding and cognitive development. According to Modak, Ronghe, Gomase and Dukare (2023) breastfeeding establishes a strong emotional bond between the mother and the child, promoting a sense of security and comfort.



Although the benefits of breastfeeding are numerous, observation shows that there has been a global decline in breastfeeding behaviour among nursing mothers and more pronounced in developing countries where clean water and good sanitation are also major challenges (Partnership for Transforming Health Systems, 2019). Typical factors responsible for this decline in breastfeeding practice according to Nabulsi in Balogun, Okpalugo, Ogunyemi and Sekoni (2017) include maternal employment, poor family support, and psychological unpreparedness for breastfeeding. A study by Aniekan, Etiobong, Eno and Ukeme (2014) showed that the rate of exclusive breastfeeding and initiation of breastfeeding is low according to another study in Ibadan as reported by Aniekan, et al. (2014) revealed that after 12 months of follow-up, none of the babies of urban elite women were being breastfed compared to 100% and 80.8% of babies in the rural poor and urban poor groups, respectively. A study by Ogundare, et al. (2023) in Ekiti State, Nigeria, revealed that although there was high level of awareness and knowledge (93%) about the importance of breastfeeding, more than 50% had negative perception about breastfeeding.

In light of this trend, one would ask, do the women have knowledge and understanding of the significant role that breastfeeding plays in the lives of their children and their own health as well? And if they lack the knowledge, can adult education programmes play any role in promoting exclusive breastfeeding among rural women in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State? Adult education refers to the practice of providing learning opportunities to adults, typically beyond the age of compulsory education. It is a diverse field that caters to the educational needs and interests of individuals who are no longer in the traditional school system. The concept of adult education encompasses a wide range of formal and informal learning activities designed to meet the specific needs of adult learners (Kobani & Iyalla, 2022).

The literature reveals that adult education programmes play crucial roles in promoting exclusive breastfeeding by providing essential knowledge and support to parents. These programmes can educate adults, especially new mothers and fathers, about the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding, proper breastfeeding techniques, and the importance of early initiation (Zeller, 2016). Additionally, they can address misconceptions, offer guidance on overcoming challenges, and create a supportive community for parents, fostering an environment conducive to exclusive breastfeeding practices. Overall, adult education contributes to empowering parents with the information and skills necessary for successful and sustained exclusive breastfeeding. Ki-moon (2010) in Kobani & Alozie (2019) stressed the transformative effect on both a family and the wider community when a woman is literate. He noted that every literate woman marks a victory over poverty and that Literate women are more likely to send their children, especially their girls, to school. He also notes that by acquiring literacy, women become more economically self-reliant and more actively engaged in their country's social, political and cultural life. All evidence shows that investment in literacy for women yields high development dividends.

To Kobani (2021) the ingenuity and productivity of the Nigerian women are such that when encouraged and supported by an understanding partner, she can go extra miles to bridge up deficiency gaps, whether in her education or finances. A part of women's education includes exporting ways of bridging the gap of mutual understanding between men and women.

There are different types of adult education programmes. However, a brief description of two (adult literacy programme and health literacy programme) which have bearing with gaining awareness and knowledge about breastfeeding is presented here. Adult literacy programme are programmes specifically aimed at improving reading, writing, and comprehension skills among adults with low literacy levels, aiming. They often involve one-on-one tutoring or small group sessions (Kapur, 2019). Adult literacy education is a form of non-formal or out of school education system provided to enhance literacy among adults. This kind of education is significant because it places emphasis on freeing the minds from the shackles of superstitions, fear, and ignorance (Godpower & Kobani, 2020). Consequently, exposing rural women to adult literacy programme would provide them with general awareness on the benefits of breastfeeding and also help them to drop certain ill perceptions about breastfeeding.

Objectives and emphasis of adult education according to Kobani (2021) include functional and literacy education; skill and vocational training to equip an adult with some means of livelihood; education for health, welfare, social and family competence, civic, communal and political responsibilities, and general education for self-fulfilment and self-actualization. Also as a humanizing process, adult education develops an individual to be able to add value to life beyond the process of earning a living through the application of personal skills. It is a noteworthy fact that as mothers and home builders, women are the first teachers that children have. In a similar way, a critical factor in community development is the nobility of character of the individuals who make up the community.



Therefore, the connection between women education and community development lies in the inner sustaining impetus which women can provide by their special nature and which serve as vital supplement to physical development (Kobani, 2021).

Health literacy is currently defined as an individual’s ability to obtain and translate knowledge and information in order to maintain and improve health in ways that are appropriate to the individual and community context (Liu, Wang, Liu, Jiang, Wang, Chen & Zhang, 2020). A low health literacy level has been linked to difficulties understanding healthcare information and to poor therapeutic concordance, which in turn increases costs and leads to an inefficient use of healthcare resources (Castro-Sánchez, Chang, Vila-Candel, Escobedo & Holmes, 2016). Likewise, women’s health literacy levels can also have an effect on their children’s health during pregnancy and after birth (Charoghchian Khorasani, Peyman, & Esmaily, 2017). As for the decision to breastfeed, the percentage of mothers who decide to breastfeed rises with their health literacy level (Corrarino, 2013). In a study, Mirjalili, Jaber, Jaber and Bonabi (2018) found that breastfeeding pattern of mothers is independent of their health literacy and it seems to take place under the influence of other personal and social-cultural factors.

The literature shows that breastfeeding is beneficial both to the child and the mother. However, observation shows that there is a decline in breastfeeding among women. Adult education programme promises to provide necessary education to promote breastfeeding practice among women. There is therefore, need for investigation on the role of adult education Programmes on exclusive breastfeeding among rural women in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State. More so, studies which investigate role of adult education programmes in exclusive breastfeeding in Khana Local Government Area is limited in the literature. Conducting this study will contribute to the body of knowledge in the area of breastfeeding and the roles that adult education plays in this regard.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was guided by three research questions.

1. What is the perception of rural women towards exclusive breastfeeding in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State?
2. What is the role of adult literacy programme in promoting exclusive breastfeeding among rural women in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State?
3. What is the role of health literacy programme in promoting exclusive breastfeeding among rural women in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised 145,609 members of the 73 registered Women Community Based Associations in the Local Government Area. The clustered sampling technique was used to select a sample of 400 from the population. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire with an overall reliability coefficient of 0.87 obtained through Cronbach Alpha. Three research questions were posed. Data gathered were analysed using frequency count and mean.

RESULT

Research Question 1: What is the perception of rural women towards exclusive breastfeeding in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State?

Table 1: Perception on Exclusive Breastfeeding

S/N	Perception on Breastfeeding	SA	A	D	SD	N	M	S.D	Decision
1	Weaning exclusively breastfed children is difficult.	143	155	31	71	400	2.93	1.07	Agree
2	With breastfeeding, children will continue to be hungry	139	156	32	73	400	2.90	1.07	Agree
3	Infants more than three months of age should be fed more with complementary food.	133	165	31	71	400	2.90	1.05	Agree
4	Early initiation of breastfeeding encourages mothers to practice exclusive breastfeeding.	89	74	84	153	400	2.25	1.18	Disagree
5	Mothers who practice exclusive breastfeeding will have sagging breasts.	137	159	33	71	400	2.91	1.06	Agree



6	Exclusive breastfeeding involves feeding baby with breast milk only.	137	159	33	71	400	2.91	1.06	Agree
7	Exclusive breastfeeding improves the health of the mother and baby.	77	89	83	151	400	2.23	1.15	Disagree
8	Exclusive breastfeeding promotes bonding between the mother and baby.	137	159	33	71	400	2.91	1.06	Agree
9	Exclusively breastfed children develop stronger immune system than children fed with formula.	77	89	83	151	400	2.23	1.15	Disagree
Grand mean							2.68	1.10	Agree

Field Data, 2023

The result in Table 1 shows the perception on exclusive breastfeeding among women in Khana Local Government Area. The result shows that the women have some level of negative perception on exclusive breastfeeding. This is evident by the mean responses on the item statements. For example, with mean response of 2.93, they perceive that weaning exclusively breastfed children is difficult. With mean response of 2.90, they perceive that with breastfeeding, children will continue to be hungry.

Research Question 2: What is the role of adult literacy programme in promoting exclusive breastfeeding among rural women in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State?

Table 2: Role of Adult Literacy in Promoting Exclusive Breastfeeding

S/N	Role of Adult Literacy in Promoting Breastfeeding	SA	A	U	DA	N	M	S.D	Decision
1	Adult literacy promotes comprehension of breastfeeding-related information more effectively.	122	157	42	79	400	2.81	1.08	Agree
2	Adult literacy promotes comprehension of the application of techniques of breastfeeding.	124	152	43	81	400	2.80	1.09	Agree
3	Adult literacy empowers women to challenge cultural norms that may hinder exclusive breastfeeding.	128	139	58	84	409	2.76	1.11	Agree
4	Adult literacy can empower women to act as advocate for breastfeeding.	100	165	39	96	400	2.67	1.10	Agree
5	Adult literacy contributes to improved economic opportunities, leading to better access to healthcare and nutrition which could inform exclusive breastfeeding.	131	152	40	77	400	2.84	1.08	Agree
Grand mean							2.78	1.09	Agree

Field Data, 2023

The result in Table 2 shows that the women under study agreed that adult literacy plays significant role in promoting exclusive breastfeeding among women. As shown, mean responses of 2.81, 2.80, 2.76, 2.67 and 2.84 for items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 show that they agreed that: adult literacy promotes comprehension of breastfeeding-related information more effectively; adult literacy promotes comprehension of the application of techniques of breastfeeding; adult literacy empowers women to challenge cultural norms that may hinder exclusive breastfeeding; adult literacy can empower women to act as advocate for breastfeeding; adult literacy contributes to improved economic opportunities, leading to better access to healthcare and nutrition which could inform exclusive breastfeeding. Furthermore, a grand mean response of 2.78 indicates that they generally agreed that adult literacy programme promotes exclusive breastfeeding among women.

Research Question 3: What is the role of health literacy programme in promoting exclusive breastfeeding among rural women in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State?



Table 3: Role of Health Literacy in Promoting Exclusive Breastfeeding

S/N	Role of Health Literacy in Promoting Exclusive Breastfeeding	SA	A	U	DA	N	M	S.D	Decision
1	Health literacy enhances understanding of the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding among women.	115	147	88	50	400	2.82	0.99	Agree
2	Health literacy enhances understanding of the proper techniques of exclusive breastfeeding among women.	138	149	37	76	400	2.87	1.09	Agree
3	Health literacy enhances understanding of the challenges associated with exclusive breastfeeding among women.	140	130	54	76	400	2.84	1.10	Agree
4	Health literacy enhances understanding of where to seek for support on exclusive breastfeeding among women.	139	148	38	75	400	2.88	1.09	Agree
5	Health literacy enhances tendencies to adhere to recommended practice of exclusive breastfeeding among women.	140	120	39	101	400	2.75	1.18	Agree
	Grand mean						2.83	1.09	Agree

Field Data, 2023

The result in Table 3 shows that the women under study agreed that health literacy plays significant role in promoting exclusive breastfeeding among women. As shown, mean responses of 2.82, 2.87, 2.84, 2.88 and 2.75 for items 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 show that they agreed that: health literacy enhances understanding of the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding among women; health literacy enhances understanding of the proper techniques of exclusive breastfeeding among women; health literacy enhances understanding of the challenges associated with exclusive breastfeeding among women; health literacy enhances understanding of where to seek for support on exclusive breastfeeding among women; health literacy enhances tendencies to adhere to recommended practice of exclusive breastfeeding among women. Furthermore, a grand mean response of 2.83 indicates that they generally agreed that health literacy programme promotes exclusive breastfeeding among women.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Research question one sought to find out the perception on exclusive breastfeeding among women in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State. The result showed that the women have negative perception on exclusive breastfeeding. This is because they perceived that: weaning exclusively breastfed children is difficult; with breastfeeding, children will continue to be hungry, infants more than three months of age should be fed more with complementary food; early initiation of breastfeeding encourages mothers to practice exclusive breastfeeding; mothers who practice exclusive breastfeeding will have sagging breasts. They generally disagreed that: exclusive breastfeeding improves the health of the mother and baby. They further disagreed that: exclusively breastfed children develop stronger immune system than children fed with formula. They however, had positive perception on the view that exclusive breastfeeding promotes bonding between the mother and baby. This result agrees with the result by Ogundare, et al. (2023) in Ekiti State, Nigeria, who found revealed that although there was high level of awareness and knowledge about the importance of breastfeeding, more than 50% had negative perception about breastfeeding.

Research question two sought to determine the role of adult literacy in promoting exclusive breastfeeding among women in the study area. The result showed that the women generally agreed that: adult literacy promotes comprehension of breastfeeding-related information more effectively; adult literacy promotes comprehension of the application of techniques of breastfeeding; adult literacy empowers women to challenge cultural norms that may hinder exclusive breastfeeding; adult literacy can empower women to act as advocate for breastfeeding; adult literacy contributes to improved economic opportunities, leading to better access to healthcare and nutrition which could inform exclusive breastfeeding. This is an indication that they have viewed that adult literacy promotes exclusive breastfeeding among the women. This result aligns with the findings of Zeller (2016) that adult literacy educates adults, especially new mothers and fathers, about the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding, proper breastfeeding techniques, and the importance of early initiation.

Research question three sought to determine the role of health literacy in promoting exclusive breastfeeding among women in the study area. The result showed that the women generally agreed that: health literacy enhances



understanding of the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding among women; health literacy enhances understanding of the proper techniques of exclusive breastfeeding among women; health literacy enhances understanding of the challenges associated with of exclusive breastfeeding among women; health literacy enhances understanding of where to seek for support on exclusive breastfeeding among women; health literacy enhances tendencies to adhere to recommended practice of exclusive breastfeeding among women. This result aligns with the view of Charoghchian, et al. (2017) that women's health literacy levels can also have an effect on their children's health during pregnancy and after birth. Similarly, Corrarino (2013) reported that the percentage of mothers who decide to breastfeed rises with their health literacy level. The result however, disagrees with the result by Mirjalili, et al. (2018) who found that breastfeeding pattern of mothers was independent of their health literacy.

CONCLUSIONS

The study was carried out to ascertain the role of adult education Programmes in promoting exclusive breastfeeding among rural women in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State. The study investigated the perception of women on exclusive breastfeeding, the role of adult and health literacy in promoting exclusive breastfeeding among women in the study area. Based on the result, it was concluded that there existed high level of negative perceptions about exclusive breastfeeding among the women. It was also concluded that the women generally viewed that adult literacy Programme promotes exclusive breastfeeding. Furthermore, it was concluded that health literacy programme promotes exclusive breastfeeding among the study group.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the result and conclusions, the following recommendations were made:

1. Awareness programmes such as market campaigns, church visitations, community visits should be organized by primary health providers to educate rural women on exclusive breastfeeding in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State. This will go a long way to inform the rural women on the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding.
2. Rural women in Khana Local Government Area should enroll for adult literacy programmes to enhance their literacy. This will help them improve their literacy level which will in turn boost the comprehension of breastfeeding-related information.
3. Community visits should be organized often by health practitioners and supported by Local Government authorities. Such visits should target providing information about good practices on breastfeeding.

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