STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE THE IMPACT OF NUTRITION EDUCATION ON THE TRADITIONAL FEEDING HABITS IN IGBO LAND: A CASE STUDY OF ORUMBAA SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ANAMBRA STATE

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Abstract

This study was earned out to 11ml l ire strategies to improve the impact of nutrition education on the traditional feeding habits in Igbo land, a case study of Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra Slate. In carrying out tin's work, three research questions were formulated based on the purpose of the study. The data used in (his work was obtained by means of questionnaire distributed to three hundred (100) adult residents in the fifteen towns that make of the local government area. The data collected was analyzed using mean score. The findings include: elders eat the choicest part of foods and meat, pregnant women are Unhidden front eating certain kinds of food/meats on the basis of superstition, families have no organised meal plans and limes for eating, emphasizing nutrition education in all levels of education and so on. Based on the findings, recommendations were made which include that mass literacy campaign should be encouraged in the area since ignorance is their major problem.

Introduction

Man is what he eats, from digestion to assimilation and from the utilization of food; the body grows, develops, and functions. One without proper understanding of nutrition may choose food unwisely and this affects growth and development. Proper understanding of nutrition involves the knowledge of:

- the nutrients and (heir function
- the nutrient composition of various food stud'
- the digestion, absorption and metabolism of the nutrients
- the deficiency diseases resulting from lack of any of the necessary food nutrients.

In Nigeria, there are lots of foods, fruits and other edible things, which one can easily choose from. However, due to traditional customs, beliefs and habits, people tend to omit from their diet certain foods that are very essential for maintaining good health. Experience has shown that people of the Igbo extraction especially those in the rural setting either writhingly or for other reasons lack the appropriate knowledge of nutritional contents of what they eat. Efforts have been made to supply this knowledge through the introduction of nutrition education.

Nutrition education is seen as the process of educating people on nutritional values and resources available to them and persuading them to change to better practices. According to Okeke in Mbah, Orhewere, Osifeso (2001), nutrition education is the study of food and how the body uses it to function, grow to full manhood/womanhood, in a healthy looking body with bright eyes, clear skin, glossy hair, well formed teeth and jaw and well co-ordinated muscles. Thus, nutrition education helps in the proper utilization of foodstuff and when this is done, the diseases prevalent in the society could be prevented to a large extent (Amazonwu, 1976). It also gives an insight into what happens when too much or too little nutrients tire taken into the body. This form of education has been mounted through awareness campaign, seminars/workshop at women foray, religious gathering, town/village meetings for the informal groups and in the curriculum of education at all levels of education under different courses, for the formal group.

Nevertheless, in a situation where this education is not utilized, the resultant effect is that people limit themselves to particular class (es) of food and there from, form the habit of feeding only on those classes of foods. This is what is termed feeding habit. Feeding habits are the settled practices of eating particular foods. They seem to be interwoven with the emotional and cultural beliefs of people. These habits are handed down from generation to generation by the social training given to the young. They constitute one major factor that affects the nutritional status of an individual. On the other hand, traditional feeding habits are the settled practices of eating, prohibiting, omitting certain food(s) as a result of custom/culture and norms of a particular society. There are other factors that could lead to feeding habit which include: taboos, weather and climate, the type of food produced within a locality, health of the individual, economic status, education, religion, fads and fallacies (Nwafor, 1990).

Reports have it that despite the efforts made through nutrition education; people of Igbo tribe have not changed appreciably in their feeding habit thus, demanding a further effort at buttering the situation. Based on the above background, the researcher investigates into the strategies for improving the impact of nutrition education on the traditional feeding habits in Igbo land, using Orumba South local government area of Anambra State.

Statement of the Problem
Despite the modern civilization and education standards people have so far attained, their nutritional feeding habits have been complicated with ignorance, taboos and superstitions. These however, have affected them health wise because of little or limited choice of food variation to eat. This has in turn, contributed to a lot of nutritional deficiency diseases such as rickets, other forms of strange deformities, anemia especially amongst children, pregnant women and the aged, goiter, eye problems, obesity and so on. Due to these nutritional deficiency problems, the researcher wants to find out the strategies for improving the situation on ground.

**Purpose of the Study**
Specifically, this study is aimed at finding out:
1) The traditional feeding habits of the people of Orumba South local government area of Anambra Slate.
2) The extent to which nutrition education has affected their traditional feeding habits.
3) The strategies that could be adopted to improve the impact of nutritional feeding habits.

**Significance of the Study**
The findings of this study will be of great help to the people of Orumba South local government area and their environs by providing them with information on food feeding habits and its effect on their health. It will also change their erroneous beliefs about certain foods. The findings will also improve their standard of living generally, and will further educate them on how to combat certain food deficiency diseases with right choice of food...

Finally, the findings of the study will be of good help to health workers and administrators in their campaigns on causes of certain diseases and ways of eliminating and/or managing those problems.

**Research Questions**
Three research questions were formulated to guide the study. They are:
1) What are the traditional feeding habits of people of Orumba South local government area of Anambra State?
2) To what extent is nutrition education affecting their traditional feeding habits?
3) What are the strategies to be used to improve the impact of nutrition education on the traditional feeding habits of the people?

**Methodology Research Design**
The research design is survey type. A survey study deals with the present and is oriented towards the determination of the current status of people in an area on study hence; the researcher explores the opinions of respondents on the strategies for improving the feeding habits of the people.

**Population of the Study**
The population of the study comprises all the adult residents in the fifteen towns that make-up Orumba South local government area.

**Sample/Sampling Technique**
Simple random sampling technique was used to select ten towns from the fifteen towns that make-up the local government area. Thirty (30) adult residents (fifteen males and fifteen females) were further randomly selected from each of the fifteen towns, making the sample size a total of three hundred.

**Research Instrument**
Questionnaire was the instrument used to elicit information from the respondents; the questionnaire comprised 20 items structured on a five point Likert rating scale of "Strongly agree", "Agree", "Undecided", "Disagree", and "Strongly disagree".

**Administration of the Instrument**
The researcher, who also collected the completed copies of the questionnaire, personally administered them. This took the researcher one week and it was intended to ensure high rate of return of the copies of the questionnaire. And hundred percent return rates were recorded.

**Method of Data Analysis**
The mean was computed and used to answer the research questions. To get the mean, the value of the five
response categories was computed using this formula: \[5 + 4 + 3 + 2 + 1 = 15 = 3.0\]

Therefore, the mean response of 3.0 and above was rated as "agree" while the mean response below 3.0 was rated as "disagree".

**Research Findings Research**

**Question 1**

What are the traditional feeding habits of the people of Orumba South Local Government Area of Anambra State?

**Table 1**
The mean rating of the respondents on the traditional feeding habits of people of Orumba South local government area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
<th>Remark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Adults prepare any available food and members of the family eat at their convenient time.</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Mothers determine the type of meals their individual families take in the community.</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The elderly members of the family are given the biggest and most nutritious portion of fish and meat.</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Most of meals prepared centers around carbohydrates e.g. cassava, yam, maize cocoa-yam, rice, etc.</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Menu plan is not used in preparation of meals.</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Water is not fetched from certain stream on a certain market days by certain villages of the town.</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Women are precluded from consumption of certain parts of meat that are seen as exclusive reserve of men e.g. gizzard.</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Pregnant women are forbidden from eating snail and &quot;bush meat&quot;</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Fruits are not properly utilized in the meal preparation because of belief that once the fruit is out of season, eating it will bring sickness.</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data in Table 1 above shows that the respondents have positive view that people of Orumba South local government area have certain traditional feeding habits. This is revealed through the positive answers given in the table. The mean of all the items ranges from 4.0 to 3.2, which are all above the acceptance mean of 3.0.

**Research Question 2**

To what extent is nutrition education affecting their traditional feeding habits?

**Table 2**
Mean rating of the extent is nutrition education affecting their traditional feeding habits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Mean Score</th>
<th>Remark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Some food habits and taboos have been given up in recent times than previously</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Methods of food preparation and handling have changed recently.</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Children are now fed with the choicest part of food and meat because they need it most.</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Most families now consider quality and quantity in preparation of their food.</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Residents have accepted the consumption of fruits as a nutritional requirement.</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Families now have organized meal plans and times.</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data in Table 2 above highlights the impact of nutrition education on the traditional feeding habits of people. Out of the six items above, respondents agree that nutrition education has not made any impact on them thereby suggesting that more effort is needed. All the items scored mean rating that are below the acceptance point of 3.0.

**Research Question 3**

What are the strategies to be used to improve the impact of nutrition education on the traditional feeding habits of the people?
Table 3 above shows that respondents agreed that all the five items presented are good strategies to be adopted to improve the impact of nutrition education on the feeding habits of the people of Orumba South local government area.

Discussion
The findings in Table 1, reveal that adults prepare any available food and members of the family eat at their convenient time, mothers determining the type of meals to prepare, elders eating the choicest part of food and meat, pregnant women are forbidden from eating snail and "bush meat", meals prepared centering around carbohydrates are some of the traditional feeding habits of the people. All these have shown that most feeding habits of Orumba South people are traditionally bound. This has an adverse effect on their health most especially on the children causing different types of diseases and stunted growth. Again, their traditional feeding habits do not favour pregnant women who are excluded from eating many foods in the name of protecting them without knowing the adverse effect such have on the expectant mother and the baby.

Furthermore, Table 2 shows that nutrition education has not made much impact on the feeding habits of people of Orumba South local government area. The areas highlighted include: families not basing their feeding on quality and quantity, not making use of fruits, not feeding children with the choicest part of food and meat, forbidden pregnant women from eating snail and "bush meat" and so on. The findings reveal that they do not eat food based on what it will give to the body but on the ground that it appeals to the eye. In so doing, many nutrients are omitted. This goes to support the taught of Ebo (1987), when she stated that if food is strictly based on people's likes and dislikes, there is the tendency to omit foods that are of high nutritive values. Thus, emphasis is still needed on nutrition education for good health of people of the area.

Finally, in Table 3, emphasizing nutrition education in the curriculum from primary level to tertiary level, organizing workshop/seminars by doctors and health workers in the community, using churches, village meetings and women foray as medium of disseminating information on nutrition education are some of the strategies needed to impact the knowledge on the people. This is highly needed because the food we eat today plays an important role in shaping our destiny tomorrow.

Conclusion
Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusion can be drawn:
1) Feeding habits of Orumba South people stem from their culture and norms.
2) Nutrition education has not made any impact on the feeding habits.
3) There is serious need to re-orient the community about their feeding habits through nutrition education.

Recommendation
Based on the findings of the study, this recommendation is made: mass literacy campaign should be encouraged in the area since ignorance is their major cause of their problems.
References

