

# **REDUCTION IN PREVALENCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DISEASES AND UNDER-FIVE MORTALITY THROUGH ENTREPRENEURIAL AND LIFELONG HEALTH EDUCATION**

**GEORGE T. SOGBEYE**

*Department of Physical and Health Education,  
University of Uyo, Uyo,  
Akwa Ibom State.*

**FELICIA S. EKPU**

*Department of Physical and Health Education,  
University of Uyo, Uyo,  
Akwa Ibom State.*

**And**

**CHRISTOPHER A. UDOKOP**

*Department of Physical and Health Education,  
University of Uyo, Uyo,  
Akwa Ibom State.*

## **Abstract**

*This paper looked at how entrepreneurial and lifelong health education could help reduce prevalence of early childhood diseases and under-five mortality. Early childhood diseases such as malaria, gastroenteritis, pneumonia, malnutrition and measles are major causes of under-five mortality especially in the developing countries. Nigeria with an estimated one million under-five children's death annually is ranked as one of the countries with the highest under-five morbidity and mortality rate in the world. The income and educational level of the parents of a child are strongly associated with the child's health status. Entrepreneurship and lifelong health education could empower families to earn more and be well informed health-wise; these will positively influence the reduction of prevalence of early childhood diseases and thereby reduce under-five mortality. These positive Indices will therefore translate into good economic sustainable development. It is recommended that regular and constant seminar/workshops should be organized on entrepreneurship for communities and that the socioeconomic status of the citizens should be improved through employment and improved welfare packages such as cooperative societies and disbursement of loans to families*

*through small and medium scale entrepreneurship. Also, regular town hall meetings should be organized to help educate communities.*

**Keywords:** Early childhood diseases, under-five mortality, Disease prevalence. entrepreneurship, lifelong health education.

Early childhood has been identified by Berks (1999) as a period of two to six years of life. It is a pre-school period characterized by adaptation tendencies. According to Park (2011), it is customary to divide early childhood into the following age periods: Infancy - Neonatal period (first 28 days of life), Post Neonatal (28 days to 1 year). Pre-school age (1 - 5 years). The author noted that early childhood is a very important age which constitutes about 20 per cent of the total population in all societies. Development at this period forms the bedrock of this feature, as the determinant of chronic diseases in later life and health behaviour are learnt at this stage.

Early childhood diseases therefore are considered as diseases occurring after birth and within the first five years of life (Gupta, 2007). Park (2011) asserted that disease prevalence refers specifically to all current cases (old or new) existing at a given point in time or over a period of time in a given population. Apoki (2003), posited that the commonest and the prevalent early childhood diseases in sub-Saharan Africa are mal-nutrition, malaria, diarrhoea, measles and respiratory tract infection. Early childhood diseases are major causes of under-five mortality especially in the developing countries. Nigeria with estimated one million under-five children's death annually is ranked as one of the countries with the highest under-five morbidity and mortality rate in the world.

Entrepreneurship is defined as the willingness and the ability of a person to seek out investment opportunities, establish and run the enterprise successfully (Okpara 2003). It generally refers to ability to do something well. An entrepreneur is a person with entrepreneurial spirit, one who is willing and able to convert a new idea or invention into a successful innovation.

Lifelong education/ learning is ongoing voluntary and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge for either personal or professional person (Department of Education and sciences, 2000). According to the commission of European committees (2016), it not only enhances social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development, but also self-sustainability as well as competitiveness and employability. Therefore, lifelong health education is concerned with man's understanding of himself and the total environment in relative to health matter and the application of this understanding to maintain and promote health. Health education encourages behaviour that promotes health, prevents illness, cure diseases, and facilitates rehabilitation (Briggs, 2010). It also involves teaching individuals and families and communities what to do to be healthy and avoid illness.

### **Early Childhood Diseases and Under-Five Mortality**

According to Berks (1999), early childhood is a period of two to six years of life. It is a pre-school period characterized by adaptation tendencies and also a period of socialization process. Similarly, Gupta (2007) asserted that nature plays a very active role in health and development of the child at this stage and identified hereditary and environmental factors as factors that may influence health, growth and development of the child.

Lucas and Gilles (2003) stated that preventive paediatrics which consists of efforts by parents and health care providers to avoid rather than cure disease and disability in children through health care promotion and preventive activity such as immunization, breastfeeding, hygiene, good nutrition can be very effective and rewarding.

According to Gupta (2007) early childhood diseases are considered as disease occurring after birth and within five years of life. Akpoki (2003), posited that the commonest and most prevalent early childhood diseases are malnutrition, diarrhoea diseases, measles, and respiratory tract infection. Gupta (2007) stated that due to prevailing poor economic situation and ignorance, the following diseases are common in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, namely malaria, gastroenteritis, pneumonia. Malnutrition and measles. Similarly Park, (2011) asserted that the under-five prevalent disease which are also the leading causes of death in Asia and Africa are malaria, acute respiratory infection, diarrhoea diseases, measles, mal-nutrition, human immune deficiency virus (HIV), acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS)/ and other neonatal causes. Though several studies have noted other causes of childhood morbidity and mortality, preventable diseases such as malaria, measles, protein-energy malnutrition and pneumonia have been identified as prevalent diseases among children especially in developing countries (World Health Organization (WHO), 2003; National Population Commission (NPC), 2003).

Malaria is a protozoan disease caused by infection with parasite of the genus plasmodium and transmitted to man by certain species of infected female anopheles mosquitoes. Park (2011) noted that over 100 countries in the world were considered malarious with about half of the figures in sub-Saharan Africa. WHO (2008) stated that the global burden of malaria remains enormous with estimated 247 million of malaria cases reported in 2006. The report went further to state that the 30% of all death resulted from malaria, with children one to five years being the most affected. Earlier WHO (2007) report estimated that one in every five childhood death was due to malaria and that a child died from the disease every 30 seconds. In corroboration of this view, Park (2011) asserted that death from malaria constituted about 25 percent in Africa.

Measles is a very infectious disease of childhood caused by specific virus of the group Myxovirus. Accordingly, Park (2011) stated that measles is an endemic disease and occurs virtually in all parts of the world. The author opined that when the disease is introduced into a virgin community, more than 90 per cent of that community will be

affected. Similarly, WHO (2004) asserted that the mortality of measles varied greatly in different parts of the world. The report noted that this is 100 to 400 times likely to cause death in pre-school children of developing countries than in developed world. The report further estimated that 30 million cases of measles occur annually with a mortality rate of about 100,000 children.

Protein energy malnutrition (PEM) is energy deficient condition due to chronic deficiency of all macronutrients. PEM which are of two types kwashiorkor and Marasmus, are very common childhood diseases mainly found in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa due to lack of food, diet that is more deficient in protein than energy and starvation (Fortulile, 2009). Approximately 43 percent of the children (230 million) in developing countries are malnourished (WHO, 2003). The report further asserted that PEM worldwide occur mostly in children who lack access to nutrition. According to Berks (1999), PEM is particularly dangerous because it interacts with disease in vicious spiral ways to produce very severe consequences.

Diarrhoea is the passing of three or more watery stools in 24hours. It is one of the commonest conditions of children in first five years of life due to their vulnerability (Nwokeome, 2009). The burden of diarrhoea and diarrheal diseases is greatest in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa mostly due to lack of access to safe water and poor sanitation (WHO, 2004). An estimated one million children in poor environment suffer from diarrhoea monthly (WHO, 2003).

Another problem that affects the infant/under-five is pneumonia. Pneumonia is inflammation of the lungs cause by bacteria, viruses or chemical irritants. Ten to fifteen per cent of children with respiratory infection have pneumonia (Akinsola, 2006). This condition mostly common in new born and pre-schoolers, is one of the prevailing childhood infections that exacts on our nation (Fortulile, 2009). It is assumed that income and educational awareness of parents play important roles in the prevalence of these diseases.

Nigeria, with an estimated one million under-five children death annually, is ranked as one of the countries with the highest infant morbidity and mortality rate in the world. (NPC, 2003). United Nations Children's Emergency Fund, (UNICEF, 2009),stated that under-five morbidity which are diseases occurring in early childhood and resulting in mortality was estimated at 201 per 1000 live births while infant mortality rate was about 100 per 1000 live births. The figure when compared to those from other developing countries like Tanzania and Ethiopia which have an average 100-189 per 1000 live births, is quite high. Figures from developed countries such as United States of America (USA) and Canada indicate much lower scores ranging from 5-7 per 1000 live births.

Briggs (2010), considered infant mortality rate as a good indicator of health status of any given community and that Nigeria like most developing countries has a high rate of infant mortality when compared with most developed countries such as United States, United Kingdom and Canada. Similarly, Abanobi (2010) submitted that

a high infant mortality rate is often taken to indicate significant unmet health needs and unfavourable environmental factors such as economic conditions, nutrition, education, child healthcare services and sanitation.

### **Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurial and Health Education**

Entrepreneurship is the process of designing, launching and running a new business. According to Offiong, Iwat and Akpan (2015), it is the art and science of innovation and risk taking for profit in business. It is the process of doing business for profit generation. Such businesses could be manufacturing (transformation of raw material into finished products) or production and services. According to the authors the whole idea of entrepreneurship is about a mindset to add value to a system through solving an identified problem.

Suleiman (2006) opined that entrepreneurship is the willingness and ability of an individual to seek for an investment opportunity to establish and run an enterprise successfully. It is a major source of wealth creation, poverty alleviation and employment generation, youth empowerment and national development. Hisrich, Peters and Shepherd (2007) added that entrepreneurship is a process of creating something new with value by devoting necessary time and effort, assuming accompanying financial, psychic and social, monetary and personal satisfaction and independence. According to Hisrich Peters and Shepherd (2007), this implies that an individual must have a quality business, vision, opportunity, mission strategy and resources. Onu and Ijezie (2010), corroborated these earlier views by adding that entrepreneurship involves the creation of values, the process of starting or growing a new profit making business. The authors further submitted that this implies, it is the process of providing a new product or service and intentional creation of value through organization by an individual contribution or small group of partners.

People who create business are called entrepreneurs, and it is the capacity to develop and organize and manage business venture along with any of its risk in order to make profit (Yetisen, Volpatti, Coskun, Cho, Kamrani, Butt, Khademhossein and Yun, 2015). Entrepreneurship education according to Azonuche and Umerri (2012) is a form of education that seeks to provide knowledge, skills, ideas and managerial abilities necessary for self-reliance. Entrepreneurial education can also be identified as all activities aimed at fostering entrepreneurial mind-set, attitudes and skills for economic growth, enterprise survival, motivation, employment creation, technological change, productivity increases and exports (Inegbenebor, 2005 and Hoffer & Potter, 2010).

Agu (2006) in Asuru and Asuru (2009) defined entrepreneurial education as a type of education that is designed to change the orientation and attitude of the recipients and in the process equip him with skills and knowledge to enable him start and manage a business enterprise. Similarly, Nria (2010) saw entrepreneurial education as the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes in a school system that enables an individual or group of persons carry on a trade or business for the purpose of self-

reliance. Nria concluded that entrepreneurial education is a life-long learning process starting as early as elementary school and through all levels of education including adult education.

The level of education of parents has been observed to influence the health of their children. Studies from developing countries have reported that child morbidity and mortality closely associated with parental education than any other factor (Chowbury, 2003 and Ekpu & Akpan, 2013). Ordinarily education on its own is very vital for progress of an individual's life and the nation. Ekpu and Akpan posited that education is of a great importance to every nation as it is quite obvious that the functionality of an individual in any nation is largely dependent on the quality of education that is impacted on that individual. They concluded that education is the major instrument that can be used to develop the human person. Ekpu and Akpan submitted that through education, there is improvement of food and sanitation, nutrition, exercise and other health rules that help to prevent diseases and enhance longevity.

The family income of a child is strongly associated with the child's health status. In Nigeria, economic survey indicated that poverty was widespread and equity in distribution of resources was large (NDHS, 2005). The survey indicated that the poor suffered from greater morbidity, mortality and malnutrition and that poverty has been shown to go together with ill health and low health service utilization in many countries. Entrepreneurial Education according to Paul (2015) is structured to achieve the following objectives.

- To offer functional education for the youth to enable them to be self-employed and self-reliance.
- Provide the youth graduate with adequate training that will enable them to be creative and innovative in identifying novel business opportunities.
- To serve as catalyst for economic growth and development.
- Offer tertiary institution graduate with adequate training in risk management to make risk bearing feasible.
- To reduce high rate of poverty, reduce rural-urban migration
- Provide the young graduate with enough training and support that will enable them to establish a carrier in small and medium sized business.
- To inculcate the spirit of perseverance in the youth and adult which will enable them to persists in any business venture they embark on;
- Create smooth transition from traditional to a modern industrial economy.

Entrepreneurial education therefore aims at making the family self-sufficient and self-reliant. It makes parents to be gainfully employed without recourse to government jobs and help in providing basic needs for family members. Accordingly, Ekpu and Uduak (2015) submitted that with entrepreneurial education with its attendant benefits, children in families will be properly nourished. The authors opined that with

entrepreneurial education parents could take the right steps at the right time in order to avoid some of the avoidable under-five mortalities.

### **Lifelong Health Education**

Information, education and communication are essential aspects of health education. Health education is an essential component of health service that involves the use of information and educational strategies to improve the health status of an individual. It is the process of giving health related information that is accurate and scientific in such a manner that influences not only knowledge but also attitude and behaviour.

Health education is a profession of educating people about health (McKenzie, Neiger & Thackeray, 2009). Similarly, Donatelle (2009) posited that areas within this profession encompasses environmental health, physical health, social health, emotion health, intellectual health and spiritual health. Briggs (2010) asserted that health education is concerned with man's understanding of himself and the total environment in relation to health matters and the application of this understanding to maintain and promote health. It encourages behaviour that promote health, prevent illness, cure diseases and facilitates rehabilitation. Health education has also been seen as the sum of all the experiences that favourably influence knowledge, attitudes and practice relating to individual and community health.

### **Conclusion**

With the discussion presented above, defining what early childhood diseases are, the meaning of under-five mortality, entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial and health education and the benefits, it is concluded that entrepreneurial and health education will go along way to reduce prevalence of early childhood disease and under-five morbidity and mortality. This is one of the facts when families are empowered financially and educated health wise, they make informed decisions and are able to meet their financial obligations to children/family and access health facilities early as the need arises.

### **Recommendations**

The authors therefore recommended as follows:

1. Entrepreneurial education should be a major focus to government at all levels and NGO's to empower families/community financially through regular and constant seminar/workshops
2. Socio-economic status of the citizens should be improved through employment and improved welfare packages.
3. Individuals and communities should be encouraged to form co-operative societies, where disbursement of loans could be made to small and medium scale entrepreneurs.

4. Government and relevant authorities should ensure that there are adequate health care facilities to cater for communities.
5. Regular and constant seminar/workshops should be organized to educate individuals and communities on health related issues.
6. Government and banks in Nigeria should endeavour and see to it that loans meant for small and medium scale industries get to the right people and make the acquisition of these loans less cumbersome.

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