

WOMEN EDUCATION: A STRATEGY FOR FAMILY HEALTH AWARENESS IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The task for nation building should include both men and women. The education of women who constitute a greater percentage of national populace has then become imperative. This paper examines the position of women in social, education, nutrition and population education awareness and concludes by recommending ways of encouraging women family health and national development.

Introduction

In Nigerian society, women are particularly disadvantaged[^] in formal education (Alele-Williams, 1989). There is a dwindling number of females who go from primary up to tertiary levels of education as a result of pregnancy, early marriage, financial constraints and prejudices. Reiterating on women discrimination by men and women themselves. Mansion (2000), Igbokwe (2001) and Ezebannagha and Umeh (2001) note that women lack the basic skills and are thus marginalized in education and labour market (unemployment). According to Imoukhuede (2003), women who make up half of our estimated 120 million populations still lag behind in all areas of national development. Nigerian women face barriers to full enjoyment of (their rights because of ethnicity, culture, religion or lack of education, Irnoukhuede cited some of these headlines that speak for themselves:

"Girl sets self ablaze... to protest forced marriage" (*The Punch*, Tuesday April, 6, 1999). "Raped girl, 16 jumps into river"¹¹ (*Sunday Punch*, July 5 1997), "40 Nigerian women died last year in Italy, 37 died at sea near Morocco etc. The case of Bariya Ibrahim Magaju which received national and international media attention. About 20,000 Nigerian women involved in international prostitution, and it costs each women about \$50,000 (about N5 million) to regain her freedom from those who sponsored the trip" *Vanguard*, Thursday March, 1, 2001. All these and more are threatening obstacles to women advancement, and consequences of low literate level of women. UNESCO (1995) endorses women marginalisation in education in the world especially in all under developed nations and attributes to it religious social and economic factors.

In the past, women education was regarded as a waste because a woman then was meant for child-bearing and cooking good food. It means that women lacked the basic skills and found themselves in the peripheral unskilled regions of the labour market.

In Nigeria, cultural norms and gender expectations still strongly influence women's dominance in family child-care and family welfare. Culturally, a couple is expected to live together and take care of the children at all times, a wife cannot live outside her family circle. If done the society will not regard her as a "woman". Also, early marriage and confinement of married women in their marital homes pose hardship to women, especially in the North. On the other hand, it is easier for an educated woman to resign her well-paid job than to separate from her family.

Mivanyi (1994) defines women education as that type of education received by women which would make them become aware of themselves and their capacity to exploit their environment. Women education is also seen as a process whereby women are given equal access to knowledge, skills, jobs and participation in wider society. Considering the highly restricted role of female population to the family, it becomes imperative that women be fully educated and knowledgeable of the importance of safe and healthy environment. This can be achieved through a planned educational programme which focuses on creating (i) Awareness on the successful family life, especially on how to take care of children, safe and clean environment (ii) Awareness on the consequences of poor family health care (iii) Attention on types, quality and quantity of food intake and personal cleanliness.

From the above points, women education becomes very important instrument in creating family health awareness in Nigeria which in turn would contribute towards achieving national development.

Women Education and Health Awareness

Women education was not considered important in the past rather emphasis was on early marriage. Young teenagers who were forced into marriage could not meet with demands of their homes in terms of their health, their children and husbands due to ignorance. These problems are common among the illiterate and semi-illiterates. Efforts are being made by individuals, organizations and the government to reverse educational level of women. This can be addressed through well planned illiteracy, poverty and provide good health practices. Adult education programme then becomes a very powerful instrument for this improvement.

Adult education is essentially an educational programme for mature persons who seek to acquire or improve their knowledge and skills for personal use or for the good of their communities (Ubong, 2000). Although the adult education programme does not have separate plan for women, such programmes like Better Life Programme. Family Support Programme etc were introduced to improve women quality of education. Wokocho (1996) list 5 major categories of adult education programmes as follows:

Health and family living.

Self-fulfillment among adults.

Remedial adult education.

Vocational/technical education

Civics, political and community competence.

Due to crucial role of women, the following health education programmes are included:

- (1) Personal hygiene.
- (2) Environmental education.
- (3) Family/population education.
- (4) Medical services (its importance).

Personal Hygiene

The objective of this course is to educate adults on personal cleanliness, different clothings for different weather condition and the consequences of being dirty.

Environmental Education

It is very important to create awareness of the type of environment within which the family members and themselves know how to maintain it and the problems inherent in that environment. For instance, people from river side or swampy environment are likely to have health problems in the family. Diseases like guinea worm, malaria, cholera, dysentery, are likely to occur in such areas. So there is need to create awareness and ways of solving such problems.

Nutrition Education

Nutrition education requires one to be aware of different types, quality and quantity of food intake needed by individuals for healthy living in the society. Due to ignorance of the illiterate women, the right combination of food, appropriate time to feed the family are neglected, most of the time, the family is fed on one type of food thereby resulting in malnutrition in the home (Mivanyi, 1994).

Population/Family Life Education

Population education is relatively recent innovation in education in the world today. It has been defined as a process which provides for a study of the population situation in the family, the community, the nation and the world with the purpose of developing in the citizens a more rational attitude and more responsible behaviour towards improving the quality of life now and in future (NERDC, 1985). This type of education is designed to create awareness and understanding of population issues directly related to social, economic and cultural development of the individuals, the family and the nation.

Family life education as a component of population education focuses on the family as a social unit. Obasi (1995) defines, family life education as the study of attitudes and skills related to dating, marriage, parenthood, family health and later life of the family as a socio-culture and economic unit in the society. In other words, population and family life education involves, among other things, making information available to people so that they may be in a position to understand themselves better and take necessary decision that will help them to strive to improve the quality of life in the family, community and nation. The role of educated mother in creating awareness on the issues like problems with or in overcrowded homes (having little for many children) or large family size, lack of educational opportunities for children, girl-child marriage, environmental problems, etc are enriched influence which will of course change people's perception. The education of women has helped to know the advantages of better child spacing and the benefits of raising a small family.

Women Education and Health Awareness

It is important that people should know the existence and utilization of modern health services, be aware of different types of diseases -communicable, air-borne and water-borne. People should also be aware of preventing measures against the diseases.

If women are educated, they would know the importance of immunization and other hazards within their environment and they would discourage their children from indulging in unhealthy practices. If awareness of the medical services provided by the government are made known to the family and they adhere to them, it is expected that there would be better health condition. The important role of educated women in the family is very glaring in areas like health, education, moral upbringing of the children, curbing cultism from the home, personal hygiene and population control agent.

Recommendations

Women education is a gate way to knowledge and power for a healthy nation, The following recommendations expected to help the nation move forward are proffered:

- (1) Government should encourage women education by making policies that will favour and encourage education of women.
- (2) Adult education programme should be established in many centres at each local government area.
- (3) Intensive campaign should be mounted against girl-child marriage, large family size, and norms that hinder women education.

Conclusion

Women must be accepted and valued for their worth and capabilities. The condition for achieving overall development for any nation must involve women. Since greater percentage of women comprise the illiterate group, the need to embark on all round educational programme for women, to enable them utilize their full potentials in the country's social, economic, and political sphere is very urgent.

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