

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Attitudinal index influencing the trend of child health care services in Cross Rivers State, Nigeria

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This study investigated the relationship between attitude indices and utilization of maternal/child health care services among women in Akpabuyo Local Government Area (LGA) of Cross River State, Nigeria. The study isolated and examined mothers' level of education, distance to health care facilities, attitude of health care givers, cultural beliefs, and the utilization of maternal health care services. A validated and reliability certified structured questionnaire was used to generate data from 150 subjects among nursing and pregnant mothers using the convenience sampling technique. Data generated were analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics. The result of the analysis showed that level of education of mothers, distance to health facilities, attitude of health care givers, and cultural beliefs were significantly related with utilization of maternal/child health care services in Akpabuyo Local Government Area of Cross River State. Based on the result of the study, the following recommendations among others were proffered: Advocacy and practical approach to the girl-child education should be pursued by the government at all levels; and that adult literacy education should be instituted in Akpabuyo Local Government Area, with maternal and child health as core component of the programme.

**Key words:** Health care services, maternal and child health, attitude, utilization.

## INTRODUCTION

Primary Health Care as a strategy to make health care accessible to all, irrespective of where they live or work (WHO 2004), has indeed brought maternal and child health care services nearer to the people, even in remotest areas. Despite the fact that maternal health care services has suffered serious neglect from past administrations in Nigeria, especially during the military era as observed by Carr-Hill (2007), there has been renewed effort since the restoration to democratic rule in the last 13 years. These efforts have been culminated in the free maternal and child health care services at both the Federal and state levels of Government.

Akpabuyo Local Government Area is predominantly an agricultural setting. The main stay of the people is farming and fishing. The population of the area is 367, 523 people. The area shares the Atlantic Coast land with Bakassi Local Government Area and Camaroon Republic, and lies between 4° and 5°40' and longitude 8° 50' and 8° east of the equator.

Pregnant mothers and their children have access to free medical care. The study area (Akpabuyo Local Government Areas) at the time of this study has over thirty-eighty (38) health facility (Ekanem, 2005) however, it may be important to note that the above figure is mainly made up of primary Health Care facilities. This implied that each ward in the area had about two health facility. The figure sounds very encouraging.

Furthermore, it is disturbing that despite these

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improvements in maternal and child health care services and access to health facilities, maternal and child mortality rate has been on the upward surge. Dagu (2004), UNICEF (2001), Nginya (2006) and Akah (2011) among other scholars observed that the morbidity and mortality rate among children and mothers is very high, especially in rural areas. As shown in the data of Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) and that of National Demographic Health Survey, maternal mortality rate stands at 704 per 100, 000 live births. This is twice higher in the rural areas; while Infant Mortality Rate is at 105 per 1,000 live births, and under-five mortality rate has been placed at 178 per 1,000. Akpabuyo as an adjoining Local Government Area to the Calabar Metropolis is fast developing. The area is hosting a cement factory (UNICEM) and other state government sponsored projects such as housing estate and private establishments that are springing up. A number of civil servants working in Calabar are resident in the area. It is the closest Local Government Area to the Calabar metropolis which is the center of governance of the Cross River State.

Okafor and Regulto (2004) posited that rural dwellers in Nigeria under-utilize maternal and child health care services. Akah (2011) in the same vein noted that accessibility and utilization in rural settings is low compared to the urban areas in Cross River State. This study thus sought to investigate the reason for low utilization of maternal and child health care services in Akpabuyo Local Government Area of Cross River State.

Educational status is measured by the number of years of formal training. Elo (2002) posited that higher education and demand for quality health care are positively related. He noted that well educated mothers are more likely to utilize health care services, access information, and use such information to better their health and that of their families.

Becker et al. (2003), Mosely and Chen (2004), Musra (2007) and Adegroye (2008) among other scholars observed that educated and high socio-economic class mothers have been found to utilize maternal and child health care services much more than the uneducated/lowly educated women and those of low socio-economic status. Other factors found to influence patronage of maternal and child health care services include distance to facility; cultural barriers; poor road network, especially in rural areas; attitude of health care providers; level of education of care givers; cultural beliefs; religion; lack of motivation of health workers; among others (Akah, 2011; Egwu, 2006; Nwosu, 2007; Adegroye, 2008). As observed above, despite the increasing investment of government into the health sector such as the free maternal and child health care services, National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), among others, maternal and child morbidity and mortality has not reduced but rather is on the increase. Death of

mothers and children are found to be resulting from preventable diseases such as malaria, diarrheal, and acute respiratory tract infections. This study is focused on finding out attitudinal indices influencing this trend in Akpabuyo Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria.

## METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for this is the survey design. The design is appropriate for studies which are intended to assess existing conditions or determine the nature of a situation as it exists at the time of investigation. This study investigated attitude indices as correlate of utilization of maternal and child health care services. The variables which were considered very important with regards to the setting of this study (Akpabuyo Local Government Area) included mothers' level of education, distance to health care facility, attitude of health care providers, and cultural beliefs, as they relate with utilization of maternal/child health care services.

Thus four hypotheses postulated to guide the conduct of the study are:

1. There is no significant relationship between mothers' level of education and the utilization of maternal health care services in Akpabuyo Local Government Area.
2. Distance to health care facilities does not significantly relate with utilization of maternal health care services by mothers in Akpabuyo Local Government Area.
3. Attitude of health care providers does not have any significant relationship with utilization of maternal health care services in Akpabuyo Local Government Area.
4. Cultural beliefs and utilization of maternal health care services does not significantly relate among mothers in Akpabuyo Local Government Area of Cross River State.

A sample size of 150 was drawn from pregnant and nursing mothers. Convenience sampling technique was utilized for the process of data collection.

The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire designed by the researchers titled "questionnaire of attitude indices and utilization of maternal/child health care services." The questionnaire which was validated and reliability certified was divided into sections A and B. Section A contained items which sought the demographic data of the respondents, while section B which was made up of 30 items designed to test the variables considered in this study.

The questionnaire was tested in a trial study using women from Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State. The split half technique was used to estimate the reliability of the instrument, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.81. Pearson Product Moment statistics was employed in the analysis of data generated for this study.

**Table 1.** Pearson product moment correlation analysis of relationship between mothers' level of education and utilization of maternal health care services.

Variable	$\sum X$ $\sum Y$	$\sum X^2$ $\sum Y^2$	$\sum Xy$	r-calculated
Mothers' level of education (x)	16.64	55.76	53.04	0.98
Utilization of maternal health care services (y)	15.38	50.45		

Significant at 0.05; df = 148; critical r = 0.195.

**Table 2.** Pearson product moment correlation analysis determine relationship between distance to health facility and utilization of maternal health care services (N = 150).

Variable	$\sum X$ $\sum Y$	$\sum X^2$ $\sum Y^2$	$\sum Xy$	r-calculated
Distance to health facility (x)	13.56	37.52	31.09	0.92
Utilization of maternal health care services (y)	13.33	35.86		

Significant at 0.05; df = 148; critical r = 0.195.

## RESULTS

The results of the analyzed of identified variables are presented in Tables 1-4

## DISCUSSION

The result as presented in Table 1 indicated that the calculated r-value of 0.98 is greater than the critical r-value of 0.195 at .05 level of significance and 148 degree of freedom. This result showed that there is a significant relationship between mothers' level of education and utilization of maternal/child health care services among dwellers of Akpabuyo Local Government Area. This result agreed with the findings of Becker et al. (2003) who asserted that mothers level of education positively related to demand for quality maternal and child health care services. Elo (2002) also observed that women with higher education are more aware of health problems and better access to health care services and information. The implication of this study is that since majority of mothers in Akpabuyo Local Government Area are of low educational status (mainly primary and secondary school leavers) as shown in the demographic segment of the instrument and a survey conducted, maternal and child health care services would be under-utilized. Opportunities available to them may not be maximized.

The result of hypothesis two analysis showed that calculated r-value of 0.99 is greater than the table r-value of 0.195 at 0.05 level of significance with 148 degrees of freedom. This result revealed that distance to health facility significantly affected the utilization of maternal/child

health care services in Akpabuyo Local Government Area. This result is in line with the findings of Akah (2011) and Handerson (2003). They noted in their similar findings that distance to health facility is a very important variable to utilization of health care service. Akah (2011) posited that utilization of services decreases with increase in distance to such facilities. This finding implied that the spread of health facilities in Akpabuyo Local Government Area may be lopsided, given the statistics of primary health care facilities, or it may be that some of them are not well equipped and thus non-functional. This shows that much is still to be done to improve access to health care services, especially among women and children.

In the same vein, the third null hypothesis was rejected. As shown in Table 3, the calculated r-value of 0.92 was greater than the table r-value of 0.195 at .05 level of significance at 148 degree of freedom. This implied that attitude of health care providers significantly affect the utilization of maternal/child health care services in the area of this study. The result is in consonance with the assertion of Akah (2011) and Egwu (2006) who noted that attitude of health workers affect patronage of health care services. They posited that attitude of health workers to clients and service delivery is poor due to poor motivation of the work force on the side of her employers. Akah (2011) further posited that rural areas utilization is low due to some reasons among which include low quality of staff and ill-equipment of the staff. The implication is that qualities of staff and job performance may be low in Akpabuyo Local Government Area. A well trained and adequately motivated work force in the health

**Table 3.** Pearson product moment correlation analysis of relationship between attitude of health care providers and utilization of maternal health care services (N = 150).

Variable	$\sum X$ $\sum y$	$\sum X^2$ $\sum y^2$	$\sum Xy$	r-calculated
Attitude of health care providers(x)	11.95	30.29	31.09	0.92
Utilization of maternal health care services (y)	13.48	37.88		

Significant at 0.05; df = 148; critical r = 0.195.

**Table 4.** Pearson product moment correlation analysis of relationship between cultural beliefs and utilization of maternal health care services (N = 150).

Variable	$\sum X$ $\sum y$	$\sum X^2$ $\sum y^2$	$\sum Xy$	r-calculated
Cultural beliefs (x)	13.76	38.56	21.77	0.97
Utilization of maternal health care services (y)	7.96	12.96		

Significant at 0.05; df = 148; critical r = 0.195.

sector in Akpabuyo Local Government Area is grossly lacking.

The result shown in Table 4 indicated that calculated r-value of 0.97 is greater than the table value of 0.195 at 0.05 level of significance and 148 degree of freedom. This result led to the rejection of the null hypothesis, while retaining of the alternate. It thus showed that cultural beliefs significantly relate with utilization of maternal/child health care services in the study area. The finding is in consonance with the submissions of Adegroye (2008), Nwosu (2007) and Egwu (2007), who observed cultural beliefs and cultural barriers as factors that affect the patronage of health care services, especially in the rural areas. The tone of the result may imply that the dwellers of Akpabuyo Local Government Area have confidence in the traditional care givers; and that their cultural views about illnesses, as it affects mothers and children may be strong among dwellers of Akpabuyo Local Government Area. Despite the fact that the orthodox medicine holds out a better hope for the people of Akpabuyo, they are less disposed to it. This may also suggest that the health care services available to them have not proved effective.

## Conclusion

Conclusively, this study showed that level of education of mothers, distance to health facilities, attitude of health care givers, and cultural beliefs significantly relate with utilization of maternal and child health care services in Akpabuyo Local Government Area. It may be important to note that many studies conducted in rural settings appear to corroborate the results of this finding.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were proffered based on the outcome of this study:

1. Governments at various levels should advocate for, and practically work hard to improve the education of the girl-child.
2. Adult literacy education should be instituted in Akpabuyo Local Government Area, especially for mothers. Maternal/child health care issues should be the core component of such programme.
3. The Akpabuyo Local Government Area in collaboration with the Cross River State Government should work hard to ensure even distribution of primary and secondary health care facilities. It is important also to ensure that the PHC services are adequate.
4. The retraining of health care givers should be a regular programme. The bench mark with regards to educational qualification of health care giver should be raised; they should be adequately remunerated and motivated.
5. Government, NGOS and Health Agencies should carry out public awareness campaigns in Akpabuyo Local Government Area with the intent to increase awareness level of especially mothers on maternal/child health care services and how they can benefit from the program.

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