

Perceived Influence of Community Education Programmes on Mitigating Harmful Traditional Practices against Women in Akwa-Ibom

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Citation: Deekor, H. L. Taylor, I. D. & Okpoyo, O. E. (2021). Perceived Influence of Community Education Programmes on Mitigating Harmful Traditional Practices against Women in Akwa-Ibom State. *International Journal of Modern Innovation & Knowledge*, 2(3); 1 - 12

Abstract

This study examined the perceived influence of community education programmes on mitigating harmful traditional practices against women in Akwa-Ibom State. Three research questions were answered to guide the study. Descriptive research survey design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 2,028 respondents. The sample size of the study was 811 respondents comprising both 712 members and 248 women leaders of the 24 community-based women organizations used for the study. This sample size represents 40% of the study population. Multistage sampling technique was adopted in the study. Six Local Government Areas and 24 community-based women organizations were randomly selected. The proportionate sampling technique was used to select the sample size used for the study. The instrument used for data collection was a closed-ended structured questionnaire. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistics (PPMC) was used to establish the reliability index at 0.82. The responses to the questionnaire were analyzed with mean and standard deviation statistic. The findings from the study revealed that cultural education programme, health education programme, and literacy education programme, all have positive influence as perceived by the respondents on mitigating harmful traditional practices against women in the study area. It was recommended among others that Government at all levels and Non-governmental Organisations interested in women education and wellbeing should partner with agency for adult and non-formal education to adequately fund literacy education, health education programmes in communities to promote community awareness on the need to shun such traditional practices that are harmful against women.

Keywords: Community Education, Programmes, Harmful Traditions, Women

INTRODUCTION

Harmful traditional practice is a term used in describing the gender and cultural unhealthy practices against people especially women that occur in different communities across societies and in different forms. According to the report of Health Scotland as cited in Manak (2015), harmful traditional practices are forms of violence which have been committed primarily against women and girls in certain communities and societies for so long that they are considered, or presented by perpetrators, as part of accepted cultural practice. Lukale (2014),

noted that harmful traditional practices reflect norms of care and behaviour based on age, life stage, gender and social class. Corroborating the above assertion, Agbaji, Agu and Osakwe (2015) noted that practices of these harmful beliefs and values in Africa include: female genital mutilation/cutting, (FGM/C), early child marriage, widowhood practices, son preference and many others. In spite of their detrimental nature and their infringement of international human rights laws, such traditional practices still exist in communities, perhaps because they are not questioned and not seen as unhealthy practices against women by those still upholding such practices where it is still operational.

However, the international community has become aware of the need to achieve equality between male and female folks and the reality that an equitable society cannot be achieved if fundamental human rights of half of human society, i.e. women, continue to be denied and dishonored. Female sexual control by men, and the economic and political subordination of women, perpetuate the inferior status of women and inhibit structural and attitudinal changes necessary to eliminate gender inequality (Fraser & Nwadinobi, 2018). As early as the 1950s, United Nations specialized agencies and human rights bodies began considering the question of harmful traditional practices affecting the health of women, but this issue has not received consistent broader consideration, and action to bring about any substantial change (Mbagwu, 2009). According to Owonikoko, Tijani, Bajowa, and Atanda, (2017), harmful practices such as female genital mutilation, early child marriage, harmful widowhood practice among others, were considered responsive cultural issues falling within the spheres of women and the family. Oranusi, and Omordu (2011), posit that traditional practices have become a known matter relating to the status and human rights of women. The motto "Women's Rights are Human Rights", adopted at the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993, as well as the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, adopted by the General Assembly the same year, recorded the reality of the status accorded to women. According to Mbagwu (2009), States are enacting new laws and regulations with regard to the development of a modern economy and modern technology and to developing practices which suit a modern democracy, yet it seems that in the area of women's rights change is slow to be accepted.

Akpala as cited in Mbagwu (2009), observed that in Nigeria, indigenous organizations such as Human Rights Activists Nigeria, Children's Right Advocacy Group, Child Life Line and the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women are working in different communities sensitizing and educating women on the dangers of some traditional practices such as widowhood rights and female genital cutting among others. However, Akinola

(2001), acknowledged that most countries like Ethiopia, Belgium, France, Sweden, United Kingdom and Ghana have barred female genital cutting and that such cultural practices are of no importance to development of communities. He furthered that in some African Countries like Nigeria, traditional practices that are harmful to women are still in existence in most communities. According to Lukale, (2015), efforts to eradicate these practices are often met with suspicion or hostility from those communities practicing them especially when efforts originate from outside the community. He furthered that attempts to change harmful traditional practices can be most effective when it originates within the culture that practices them. Base on the above assertion, it means that eradicating or mitigating harmful traditional practices against women will require the cooperation and understanding of community leaders, policy makers and the people who have witnessed similar cases and have discouraged same in their own environment.

However, community education is a non-formal system of learning which is rooted in the process of empowerment, social justice, change, challenges, respect and collective consciousness which is found within the community and of reflecting the development needs of individuals and the community (Okeke, 2019). This definition means that the process of learning in the community should promote social justice among members of the community including the women. Akande (2017), assert that community education is a type of education needed to ensure the self-confidence; self-respect and personal independence as well serve as a guide to human rights in achieving social inequality. The above assertion implies that if community inhabitants are properly conscientize on the implications of such harmful traditional practices against women in communities.

Community education therefore, through its myriads of programmes, sensitizes and reawakens the women on their rights and effects of such obnoxious traditional practices against them. This will empower women to begin to fight to protect their rights in communities. Community education is associated with programmes that can be used to curb these harmful traditional practices against women in communities. Some of these community education programmes as identified by Auwalu (2019) are cultural education, health education programme, literacy education programme, among others. These identified programmes can be used to reach out to the communities, to educate and sensitize them on the need to jettison harmful traditional practices against women in the communities. It is based on this background that this study was designed to investigate the perceived influence of community education programmes in mitigating harmful traditional practices against women in Akwa-Ibom State.

Statement of the Problem

It was observed that women's vulnerability to harmful traditional abuse in most communities in Akwa Ibom State is in diverse forms and is deeply rooted in the culture and traditions of their communities. In practicing these obnoxious traditions community inhabitants feel justified and even seek social legitimacy for their conduct while the victims may not openly report their experiences (Mbagwu, 2009). Most of the women that are victims are limited from getting to the right information that can empower them to fight for their right due to their inability to speak out on their cultural abuse. Moreover, information on these practices may be concealed for numerous reasons such as fear-induced restrictions, ignorance, low literacy level/development, backwardness of the people and women's subordinate positions imposed on them by the society. Traditionally, in Akwa Ibom State, it is observed that women uphold these traditional practices against them. Certainly, such harmful traditional practices against women; seem to have recurrent health problems, such as sexual and reproductive tract infections among others (Uche, 2015).

However, the continuous practice of these harmful traditional practices could be attributed patriarchy and religion belief, and lack of information and essential services; which render women powerless to boldly assert their rights even when they are maltreated (Barret, 2018). This means that the issue of harmful traditional practices is a recurrent theme that requires a range of community education programmes to mitigate community members from upholding such traditional harmful practices against women in the communities. Some of these community education programmes as identified by Auwalu (2019) include; cultural education, health education programme, and literacy education programme. Therefore, the need to find out how these identified community education programmes can be used to mitigate forms of harmful traditional practices against women in rural communities of Akwa –Ibom State, was the problem of this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceived influence of community education programmes on mitigating harmful traditional practices against women in Akwa-Ibom State. The specific objectives were to:

1. Examine the perception of members and leaders of community-based women organization on the extent to which cultural education programme influence the mitigation of harmful traditional practices against women in Akwa- Ibom State.

2. Find out the perception of members and leaders of community-based women organization on extent to which health education programme influence the mitigation of harmful traditional practices against women in Akwa- Ibom State.
3. Examine the perception of members and leaders of community-based women organization on extent to which literacy education programme influence the mitigation of harmful traditional practices against women in Akwa- Ibom State.

Research Question

The following research questions were put forward for the study

1. To what extent does cultural education programme influence the mitigation of harmful traditional practices against women as perceived by members and leaders of community-based women organizations in Akwa-Ibom State?
2. To what extent does health education programme influence the mitigation of harmful traditional practices against women as perceived by members and leaders of community-based women organisations in Akwa-Ibom State?
3. To what extent does literacy education programme influence the mitigation of harmful traditional practices against women as perceived by members and leaders of community-based women organizations in Akwa-Ibom State?

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in six Local Government Areas from the three senatorial districts of Akwa-Ibom State. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. The Population of the study was 2028 comprising 1780 members and 248 leaders of registered 24 community-based women organizations in six Local Government Areas in Akwa-Ibom State. The local Government areas includes; Oron, Onna, Ibesikpo-Asutan, Uruan, Ukanafun, and Ikono. The sample for this study was 811 respondents, comprising 712 members, and 248 leaders of the community-based women organizations used for the study. This sample size was drawn from the total population of the study and represent 40% of the entire study population. This was done with proportionate sampling technique to ensure equal representation. The instrument that was used for this study was a closed-ended structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was structured on modified four (4) point scale rated on Very High Extent (VHE)-4-point, High Extent (HE)-3-point, Low Extent (LE)-2 point, Very Low Extent (VLE)-1 point. The face and content validity of the instrument was ensured by two experts in the field of community development from Rivers State University. The reliability of the instrument was determined using test-retest method and analyzed with Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistic (PPMC) which gave the reliability index of 0.82 indicating that the instrument was

reliable. A total of 811 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents. Out of 811 copies distributed, only 796 copies were correctly filled comprising 706 for members and 90 for leaders representing 98.2% retrieval rate and was used for the analysis, while 15 copies of the questionnaire were lost.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results of the study were presented as follows.

Research Question 1: To what extent does cultural education programme influence the mitigation of harmful traditional practices against women as perceived by members and leaders of community-based women organizations in Akwa-Ibom State?

Table 1: Mean Responses on the Perception of Members and Leaders of Community-based Women Organizations on the Extent to which Cultural Education Programme Influence the Mitigation of Harmful Traditional Practices Against Women in Akwa-Ibom State.

S/N	Items	CBWOs Members			CBWOs Leaders		
		$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
1	Cultural education informs us of the consequences of harmful traditional practices against women.	3.28	0.58	VHE	3.36	0.88	VHE
2	Raise our awareness on the need to shun harmful traditional practice against women.	3.15	0.74	VHE	3.23	0.90	VHE
3	Educates us on a safer way of carrying out traditional practices	3.29	0.58	VHE	3.31	0.92	VHE
4	Educates us on possible ways of avoiding future occurrences of harmful practices	3.71	0.58	VHE	3.53	0.62	VHE
5	Improves our level of awareness to protest against cultural practice	3.32	0.59	VHE	3.40	0.80	VHE
	Average Mean	3.27		VHE	3.37		VHE

Table 1 above for research question one shows the Mean responses of respondents' perception on the extent to which cultural education programme influence the mitigation of harmful traditional practices against women in Akwa-Ibom State. Item 1 has mean scores of 3.28 and 3.36, standard deviation of 0.58 and 0.88. Item 2 have mean scores of 3.15 and 3.23, standard deviation of 0.74 and 0.90. Item 3 have mean scores of 3.29 and 3.31, standard deviation of 0.58 and .92. Item 4 have mean scores of 3.29 and 3.53, standard deviation of 0.58 and 0.62. Item 5 have mean scores of 3.32 and 3.40, standard deviation of 0.59 and 0.80. With an average mean of 3.27 and 3.37 for members and leaders respectively, the results indicate that both the members and leaders of community-based women organizations strongly established that cultural education programmes can mitigate harmful traditional practices against women in Akwa-Ibom State.

Research Question 2: To what extent does health education programme influence the mitigation of harmful traditional practices against women as perceived by members and leaders of community-based women organizations in Akwa-Ibom State?

Table 2: Mean Responses on the Perception of Members and Leaders of Community-based Women Organizations on the Extent to which Health Education Programme Influence the Mitigation of Harmful Traditional Practices Against Women in Akwa-Ibom State.

S/N	Items	CBWOs Members			CBWOs Leaders		
		$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
6	Involving women in health education programmes raises the awareness of women on health problems associated with harmful traditional practices against them	3.36	0.60	VHE	3.59	0.60	VHE
7	Engaging women in health education programmes enable women to become literate on traditional health related issues	3.31	0.59	VHE	3.66	0.54	VHE
8	Health education makes women become conscious of such harmful traditional practices against them	3.26	0.64	VHE	3.46	0.77	VHE
9	Health education programmes makes community members become aware of health implication of harmful traditional practices against women	3.32	0.64	VHE	3.23	1.04	VHE
10	Raises awareness of community inhabitants on the need to end harmful traditional practices against women	3.34	0.60	VHE	3.48	0.71	VHE
	Average Mean	3.32		VHE	3.48		VHE

Table 2 above for research question two shows the mean responses of respondents' perception on the extent to which health education programme influence the mitigation of harmful traditional practices against women in Akwa-Ibom State. Item 6 has mean scores of 3.36 and 3.59, standard deviation of 0.60 and 0.60. Item 7 have mean scores of 3.31 and 3.66, standard deviation of 0.59 and 0.54. Item 8 have mean scores of 3.26 and 3.46, standard deviation of 0.64 and 0.77. Item 9 have mean scores of 3.32 and 3.23, standard deviation of 0.64 and 1.04. Item 10 have mean scores of 3.34 and 3.48, standard deviation of 0.60 and 0.71, with an average mean of 3.32, and 3.48 for members and leaders respectively. The result indicates that both members and leaders of community-based women organizations were strongly in the same perception that health education programme influence the mitigation of harmful traditional practices against women in Akwa-Ibom State

Research Question 3: To what extent does literacy education programme influence the mitigation of harmful traditional practices against women as perceived by members and leaders of community-based women organizations in Akwa-Ibom State?

Table 3: Mean Responses on the Perception of Members and Leaders of Community-based Women Organizations on the Extent to which Literacy Education Programme Influence the Mitigation of Harmful Traditional Practices Against Women in Akwa-Ibom State.

S/N	Items	CBWOs Members			CBWOs Leaders		
		$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
11	Involving women in literacy education programme enables illiterate women to read related information on harmful practices against them	3.37	0.62	VHE	3.54	0.69	VHE
12	Empower women to advocate against the continuation of harmful practices against them	3.42	0.61	VHE	3.73	0.63	VHE
13	Empowers women to be literate as to enlighten others on how such practices affect their health	3.31	0.59	VHE	3.42	0.82	VHE
14	Enables community members to read more information on how to end harmful practices against women	3.28	0.61	VHE	3.32	0.95	VHE
15	Read news and books to update their knowledge on issues concerning the health of women	3.22	0.68	VHE	3.18	1.15	VHE
	Average Mean	3.32		VHE	3.44		VHE

Table 3 above for research question three shows the mean responses of respondents' perception on the extent to which literacy education programme influence the mitigation of harmful traditional practices against women in Akwa-Ibom State. Item 11 has mean scores of 3.37 and 3.54, standard deviation of 0.62 and 0.69. Item 12 have mean scores of 3.42 and 3.73, standard deviation of 0.61 and 0.63. Item 13 have mean scores of 3.31 and 3.42, standard deviation of 0.59 and .82. Item 14 have mean scores of 3.28 and 3.32, standard deviation of 0.61 and 0.95. Item 15 have mean scores of 3.22 and 3.18, standard deviation of 0.68 and 1.15., with an average mean of 3.32, and 3.344, for both members and leaders respectively. The result indicates that both members and leaders of community-based women organizations strongly shared same opinion that literacy education programme influence the mitigation of harmful traditional practices against women in Akwa-Ibom State.

Discussion of Findings

In the line with the research question one which shows the mean rates on how cultural education programmes can discourage harmful cultural practices against women in Akwa-Ibom State among CBOs members and leaders. The results indicate that both the members and leaders of

CBOs strongly agreed that cultural education programmes can discourage harmful cultural practices against women in Akwa-Ibom State. The results in this study is consistent with other studies that examined similar cases (Ojua, Ishor, & Ndom, 2013; Agbaje, Agu, & Osakwe, 2015; Liman, 2016). In a related study, Ojua et al. (2013) posited that educating women culturally, will not only help them, but will also make women refuse to be victimised by any harmful practices that does not promote health. They further posited that women who acquired education are likely keep their home, and propagate the information to her generation so they are not victimised. Similarly, Liman (2016) submits that there is need to transform traditional beliefs that constitute and perpetuate harmful practices and violence against women. This can be achieved through community education programmes, to educate and to liberate the mind set of community members from those traditional practices that are harmful to human nature especially against women.

In the line with the research question two which shows the mean response rates on how health education programme can discourage harmful traditional practices against women in Akwa-Ibom State. The result indicates that both the members and leaders of CBOs strongly agreed that health education programmes can discourage harmful traditional practices against women. The results in this study agrees with the findings of (Akinwusi, & Ogundele, 2008; Liman, 2016; Waigwa, Doos, Bradbury-Jones, & Taylor, 2018). Akinwusi and Ogundele (2008) that health education training programmes have impact on harmful traditional practices. They further suggested that health education should be make a core subject at all levels of educational institutions because of its benefits in creating awareness and changing individuals' attitude positively on harmful traditional practices and other related issues. In another related study, Waigwa et al., (2018) posited that health education increases the possibility of effective, collective change in behaviour as well as attitude which leads to the sustainable prevention of traditional practices such as female genital circumcision and ultimately the improved reproductive health and well-being of individuals especially in rural communities. Thus, the approach to health education programmes is for interventions, which is found to be associated with the effective in the intervening harmful traditional practices (Waigwa et al., 2018). Based on the findings it is important to suggest health education programmes should be promoted in rural communities, especially in the study area, as a veritable tool for discouraging or reducing harmful traditional practices against women in the study.

In the line with the research question three which shows the mean response rates on how literacy education programme can discourage harmful traditional practices against women in Akwa-Ibom State. The result indicates that both the members and leaders of CBOs strongly agreed

that literacy education programme can discourage harmful traditional practices against women in Akwa-Ibom State. The results in this study is consistent with other studies that examined similar cases (Awgichew, & Seyoum, 2017; Robinson-pant, 2014; Glover, Libeling, Goodman, & Barrett, 2018; Gwademba, 2018; Chopra, 2019). Gwademba (2018) reported that eempowering women through education is a vital process of change and it can be used to eliminate any form of harmful traditional practices and this can only be achieved through organised literacy programmes that create awareness on related issues. This result has reiterated that literacy programme have enable people to recognize when information is needed and give them the ability to locate, evaluate and use it effectively. Education being a continuous process therefore endows the information literate persons with skills to be able to organize knowledge, find information and use the information such that dissuade women from harmful traditional practices. With literacy programme, harmful traditional practices can be reduced and the knowledge will be past future generation to avoid such harmful practices.

CONCLUSION

The study has emphasised the need for the adoption of community education programmes as a means of mitigating the practice of harmful traditional practices against women in the study area, and Nigeria at large. Thus, there is need for government at all levels to effectively implement the identified community education programmes and legislations that promote women right by creating awareness through these programmes to ensure that this harmful traditions against women are put to an end to improve the welfare of women and that of the communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Government at all levels and education sector should periodically arrange cultural education programme to enlighten and create awareness among women and community members on the need to stop harmful cultural practices against women.
2. Ministry of health and NGOs whose focus is on improvement of health should embark on regular health education programme in the communities to conscientize women and community members on health implications associated with harmful traditional practices against women.
3. Government at all levels and Non-governmental Organisations interested in women education and their wellbeing should partner with agency for adult and non-formal education to adequately fund literacy education programme in communities to promote

community awareness on the need to shun such traditional practices that are harmful against women.

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