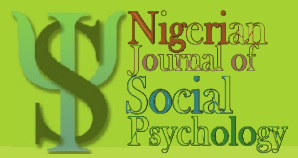


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Influence of Cultural Factors on Health Seeking Behavior in Ebonyi State, South East, Nigeria: The Ishiagu-Ebonyi Exemplar

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Abstract

This paper investigates the influence of cultural factors on health seeking behaviour in Ebonyi State, South East, Nigeria: The Ishiagu-Ebonyi Exemplar. The specific objectives are to find out the cultural factors influencing health-seeking behaviour in the Ishiagu community and to suggest measures that could be taken to improve the health-seeking behaviour among individuals in Ishiagu. Social Learning Theory was adopted as the theoretical framework. This study adopted a descriptive survey design. A survey research design was adopted. The population for this study was seventy-three thousand, six hundred and fifty-seven (73,657). Taro Yamani formula was used to determine the sample size of 255. The study employed a questionnaire in the collection of data and a simple percentage was used in analyzing data. The study found that; the health seeking behavior can be influenced by a myriad of cultural factors, such as beliefs, values, traditions, and social norms within Ishiagu community or group. It also revealed that by implementing measures such as promoting information literacy skills, fostering curiosity and a growth mindset, providing access to diverse sources of information, leveraging technology, and fostering a culture of continuous learning, organizations can empower individuals to seek out relevant information effectively. The study among others recommended that ensuring the availability of healthcare services, including healthcare facilities, trained healthcare professionals, and adequate medications, can reduce barriers to health seeking behavior.

Keywords: Cultural, Health, Health-seeking, Behaviour, Seeking behaviour

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the influence of cultural and behavioural factors on health-seeking behavior among Nigerians (Olapade-Olaopa, & Afolabi, 2018). Health-seeking behavior in Nigeria has been influenced by various factors throughout history. During the pre-colonial era, traditional healers and herbal remedies were commonly used as the primary sources of healthcare (Idowu & Afolabi, 2015). With the colonization of Nigeria by the British, Western medicine and healthcare services were introduced, leading to a shift in health-seeking behavior. However, the dominance of traditional medicine remained strong, especially in rural communities.

Many Nigerians still rely on traditional healers and herbal remedies for primary health care. This can be attributed to the long historical association between culture and medicine in Nigeria. Cultural beliefs and traditions can sometimes lead to the social stigma surrounding certain health conditions (Onwujekwe, & Afolabi, 2018). This discourages individuals from seeking appropriate medical care, leading to delayed diagnosis or treatment. Linguistic diversity poses challenges in accessing and utilizing healthcare services. Limited proficiency in English, the language of healthcare documentation, can hinder effective communication between patients and healthcare providers. Cultural norms and traditional gender roles can limit women's access to healthcare. Barriers such as restrictive clothing, long distances to healthcare facilities, and male dominance in healthcare decision-making can hinder women's health-seeking behavior.

Cultural factors play a significant role in shaping individuals' health seeking behavior. In Nigeria, cultural norms, values, beliefs, and traditions influence individuals' attitudes towards healthcare. Some cultural beliefs, such as the fear of witchcraft and the supernatural, may deter people from seeking medical attention, as they may perceive their symptoms as spiritual rather than physical (Oyefara, 2011). Additionally, socioeconomic factors, such as poverty and limited access to healthcare resources, also influence health seeking behavior. People from disadvantaged communities may struggle to afford medical expenses or transport themselves to the nearest medical facility.

Behavioral factors, such as knowledge and attitudes toward health, also impact health seeking behavior. In Nigeria, inadequate health literacy and poor understanding of warning signs and symptoms of common illnesses can hinder individuals from recognizing the need for medical attention (Webair, 2013). Additionally, a lack of trust in healthcare providers or fear of medical procedures can also deter people from seeking timely care. Furthermore, traditional beliefs and practices, such as herbal remedies and traditional medicine, often compete with modern healthcare practices. This clash of cultures can lead to individuals preferring alternative remedies over seeking professional medical advice.

The town of Ishiagu, located in southeastern Nigeria, provides a unique experience for studying the impact of cultural factors on health seeking behavior. The town has a strong culturally rooted traditional healthcare system, which coexists with modern medicine. This combination provides an opportunity to explore the factors that influence individuals' choices between the two systems.

Statement of the Problem

Existing literature confirms that different cultures construct health and illness differently (Gopalkrishnan, 2018; Fernando, 2014; Nguyen & Bornheimer, 2014). These scholars contend that the diversity in culture comes with consequences in terms of the motivation to seek treatment, coping with symptoms, family and community support, pathways taken to health care, and who to seek care from. Some cultures attribute onsets of mental illness to black magic, spirits, breaking of taboos, or "evil eye". In such a context, rectification of the problem is left to elders, traditional healers and other significant persons in the community (Helman, 2007). Religion and spirituality are also associated with such perceptions of the onset of illness and therefore play a big role in rectification of the problem (Hechanova & Waelde, 2017). Mental, neurological, and substance use (MNS) disorders are a leading cause of burden of disease as measured using disability-adjusted life years (Meyer & Ndeti, 2016) Understanding people's attitudes and beliefs towards issues surrounding mental illness is the first step to effective

treatment and sustainable recovery. There has been very insufficient information as regards to treatment and behaviour of people with mental illness. It is consequently vital to study sociocultural aspects of mental illness so that social and culturally pertinent actions can be taken, or strategies put in place in service provisions such as socio-cultural guides in treatment strategies and other supportive mechanisms (Gopalkrishnan, 2018).

The health-seeking behavior of individuals in the Ishiagu community is influenced by several cultural and behavioral factors. These factors include traditional beliefs, language barriers, socioeconomic status, and health education. For instance, traditional healers, known as "dibia," hold a prominent position in Ishiagu society. Many community members may prefer consulting them due to a deep-rooted belief in their supernatural powers and alternative remedies. Additionally, communal values and norms often dictate individuals' health-seeking choices, with collective decision-making processes prevailing over individual choices. Such cultural factors significantly affect the utilization of modern healthcare services in Ishiagu community.

Again, limited health literacy and awareness levels hinder individuals' ability to adequately interpret health-related information. This, in turn, affects their decision-making process and the pursuit of appropriate healthcare services. Additionally, certain cultural practices, such as alcohol consumption, smoking, and unhealthy eating habits, can further contribute to the prevalence of health issues within the community. As a result, individuals may delay seeking medical attention until their conditions worsen, thereby hindering effective health seeking behavior. It is against the above problems that the study wishes to investigate the influence of cultural factors on health seeking behavior in Ebonyi State, South East, Nigeria: The Ishiagu-Ebonyi Exemplar.

Research Questions

To address the problem stated above, the following research questions will guide the study:

1. What are the cultural factors influencing health seeking behavior in the Ishiagu community?
2. What measures could be taken to improve the health seeking behaviour among individuals in Ishiagu community?

Theoretical Orientation

This study is anchored on the Social Learning Theory. Social learning theory was propounded by several theorists but prominent among them was Albert Bandura (1925). It is Bandura's view that the learner plays a prominent role in cognitively selecting, organizing, and transforming stimuli from the environment in which he is found. Bandura (1973) further stated that aggression is not an innate drive like hunger in search of gratification. Social learning theory, also known as observational learning, suggests that individuals learn new behaviors by observing the actions of others and the consequences of those actions. This theory, popularized by psychologist Albert Bandura, emphasizes the importance of social influence in shaping an individual's behavior. Bandura believed that people can learn to adopt health-seeking behaviors by observing others who engage in these behaviors. This has significant implications for public health interventions aimed at promoting healthy behaviors and reducing risky behaviors such as smoking, poor diet, and lack of exercise.

Health-seeking behavior is a critical aspect of public health as it determines the individual's willingness to adopt preventive measures and seek healthcare services when needed. According to the social learning theory, individuals are more likely to adopt health-seeking behaviors if they witness positive outcomes in others who engage in these behaviors. For example, a person

may be more inclined to exercise regularly if they see their friends or family members reaping the benefits of a healthy lifestyle, such as weight loss and improved physical fitness.

Moreover, individuals are also influenced by social norms and expectations related to health-seeking behavior. People tend to conform to societal standards and expectations, which can either motivate or deter them from engaging in certain health behaviors. For instance, if a person perceives that their social circle values regular exercise and healthy eating, they may be more inclined to adopt these behaviors themselves to fit in and gain social approval.

In addition, the social learning theory suggests that individuals can also learn health-seeking behaviors through direct instruction and reinforcement. For example, a healthcare provider may encourage a patient to engage in regular physical activity by providing them with information on the benefits of exercise and offering positive reinforcement for their efforts. This type of guidance and support can help individuals build the self-efficacy needed to sustain healthy behaviors over time.

Furthermore, social learning theory highlights the importance of modeling in promoting health-seeking behavior. Individuals are more likely to adopt new behaviors if they see others modeling those behaviors in a positive light. This underscores the value of role models in influencing health-related decisions and inspiring others to make positive changes in their own lives. By showcasing the benefits of healthy behaviors through influential figures in society, public health campaigns can effectively promote health-seeking behaviors on a larger scale.

Social learning theory provides valuable insights into the factors that influence health-seeking behavior and how individuals can be motivated to adopt healthy behaviors. By understanding the power of social influence, public health practitioners can design interventions that leverage social norms, modeling, and reinforcement to promote positive health behaviors in communities. By fostering a supportive social environment that encourages and rewards healthy choices, we can empower individuals to take control of their health and well-being, ultimately leading to improved quality of life and reduced disease burden.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Concept of Health-seeking Behavior

This is an actions and decisions individuals make to maintain or improve their health. It includes seeking medical care, adopting healthy behaviors, and engaging in activities that promote overall well-being. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), health-seeking behavior is influenced by a variety of factors including socioeconomic status, education level, cultural beliefs, and access to healthcare services (WHO, 2019). Health-seeking behavior is the recognition of symptoms and the decision to seek medical care. This process is often influenced by individual perceptions of illness, cultural beliefs, and previous experiences with the healthcare system. For example, some individuals may delay seeking care due to fear of a diagnosis or lack of trust in healthcare providers (WHO, 2019). Others may prioritize self-care practices and home remedies before seeking formal medical treatment. These factors play a significant role in shaping health-seeking behavior and can impact the effectiveness of treatment and management of health conditions.

In addition to seeking medical care, health-seeking behavior also includes adopting healthy behaviors and lifestyle choices that promote overall well-being. This may involve engaging in regular physical activity, maintaining a balanced diet, getting enough sleep, and avoiding harmful substances such as tobacco and alcohol. These behaviors not only prevent the onset of

chronic diseases but also improve overall quality of life and longevity. By understanding the importance of these behaviors, healthcare providers can educate patients on the benefits of healthy living and empower them to take control of their own health.

Cultural beliefs and practices also play a significant role in shaping health-seeking behavior. Different cultures have varying perspectives on health and illness, which can influence the decisions individuals make regarding treatment and care. For example, some cultures may prioritize traditional medicine and herbal remedies over modern medical practices, while others may place a strong emphasis on spiritual healing and ritualistic practices. Healthcare providers must be sensitive to these cultural differences and work with patients to develop treatment plans that are respectful of their beliefs and values. Access to healthcare services is another key factor that influences health-seeking behavior. Individuals who lack access to affordable and quality healthcare may be less likely to seek medical care when needed. This can result in delayed diagnoses, untreated conditions, and poor health outcomes. Efforts to improve access to healthcare services, such as expanding insurance coverage and increasing the number of healthcare providers in underserved areas, are essential in promoting positive health-seeking behavior and reducing disparities in health outcomes.

Health-seeking behavior is also influenced by social and environmental factors such as family support, peer influences, and community resources. Individuals who have a strong support system and access to resources are more likely to engage in behaviors that promote their health and well-being. Conversely, those who lack social support or live in environments that are not conducive to healthy living may face barriers to seeking care and maintaining good health. Healthcare providers can play a critical role in connecting individuals to community resources and support services that can help them overcome these barriers and improve their health-seeking behavior.

Cultural Factors Influencing Health-Seeking Behaviour

The pursuit of better health is a fundamental aspect of human life that is influenced by a variety of factors, including culture. Cultural factors play a significant role in shaping individuals' health-seeking behaviors, as they influence beliefs, values, customs, and practices related to health and sickness. One important cultural factor that influences health-seeking behavior is belief systems. Beliefs about the causes of illness and the appropriate methods of treatment vary across cultures. For example, in some cultures, illness may be seen as a punishment for wrongdoing or as a result of supernatural forces. These beliefs can impact individuals' decisions about when and how to seek medical care. Studies have shown that individuals are more likely to seek care from traditional healers or engage in alternative medicine practices when their cultural beliefs are not aligned with Western biomedical models of healthcare (Im et al., 2018).

Values also play a significant role in shaping health-seeking behavior. Cultural values such as individualism versus collectivism, belief in hierarchies, and attitudes towards authority figures can influence how individuals perceive illness and the healthcare system. For example, individuals from collectivist cultures may prioritize the well-being of their family or community over their health, leading to delayed or inadequate healthcare-seeking behavior. Understanding these cultural values is essential for healthcare providers to provide culturally competent care (Saha et al., 2010).

Cultural customs and practices related to health and sickness can also impact health-seeking behavior. For example, some cultures have specific rituals or traditional healing practices that are believed to be effective in treating illness. These customs may influence individuals'

decisions about where to seek care and what treatments to pursue. In some cases, cultural practices may conflict with Western medical recommendations, leading to challenges in providing effective care (Horst et al., 2017). Language and communication barriers can also influence health-seeking behavior. Individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds may face challenges in understanding healthcare information and communicating their needs to healthcare providers. Language barriers can lead to misunderstandings, misdiagnoses, and inadequate treatment. Healthcare providers must be aware of these barriers and take steps to ensure effective communication with patients from diverse cultural backgrounds (Karasz et al., 2020).

Socioeconomic factors, such as income, education, and access to healthcare services, also play a role in shaping health-seeking behavior. Cultural beliefs and practices related to health may be influenced by individuals' socioeconomic status. For example, individuals with lower income levels may be more likely to rely on home remedies or delay seeking medical care due to financial constraints. Healthcare providers must consider the impact of socioeconomic factors on health-seeking behavior when designing interventions to improve healthcare access and outcomes (Peters et al., 2019). Religious beliefs and practices can also influence health-seeking behavior. Many religions have specific teachings and practices related to health and sickness. For example, some religious groups may have beliefs about the sanctity of life that affect decisions about end-of-life care. Understanding and respecting patients' religious beliefs is essential for healthcare providers to provide culturally competent care and support patients' spiritual well-being (Koenig et al., 2016).

Family and social networks play a key role in shaping health-seeking behavior. In many cultures, healthcare decisions are made in consultation with family members or community elders. Family members may influence individuals' decisions about when and where to seek care, as well as the types of treatments they pursue. Healthcare providers must engage with patients' family members and social networks to ensure that they are supportive of healthcare decisions and treatments (Ozeren et al., 2015).

Measures to Improve Health-Seeking Behavior

Improving health-seeking behavior can lead to early detection and treatment of diseases, better management of chronic conditions, and ultimately, improved health outcomes. One important measure to improve health-seeking behavior is increasing access to healthcare services. Limited access to healthcare facilities, especially in rural and underserved areas, can prevent individuals from seeking medical care when needed. By expanding the availability of healthcare services, including primary care clinics, hospitals, and community health centers, individuals are more likely to seek timely medical attention. This is supported by research that shows improved access to healthcare facilities is associated with better health-seeking behavior and decreased morbidity and mortality rates (Liu et al., 2017).

Another measure to enhance health-seeking behavior is increasing health literacy. Health literacy refers to an individual's ability to understand and interpret health information, which can influence their decision-making process when seeking medical care. Low health literacy has been associated with poor health-seeking behavior, as individuals may struggle to comprehend medical instructions or make informed decisions about their health. Therefore, promoting health education and communication strategies that are tailored to individuals' literacy levels can empower them to seek appropriate medical care when needed (Berkman et

al., 2011). In addition, addressing cultural and social factors that may influence health-seeking behavior is essential. Cultural beliefs, practices, and social norms can impact how individuals perceive illness and healthcare, affecting their willingness to seek medical care. By promoting culturally competent care and addressing social determinants of health, such as poverty, education level, and stigma, healthcare providers can build trust with patients and encourage them to seek timely medical care (Betancourt et al., 2016). Research has shown that culturally tailored interventions can improve health-seeking behavior and health outcomes among diverse populations.

Furthermore, utilizing technology and digital health tools can also improve health-seeking behavior. With the rise of telemedicine and mobile health apps, individuals have greater access to medical information, consultations, and reminders for healthcare appointments. These digital health tools can help individuals overcome barriers to seeking medical care, such as transportation issues or work commitments, by providing convenient and user-friendly platforms to connect with healthcare providers (Bashshur et al., 2018). Research has demonstrated the efficacy of telemedicine in improving health-seeking behavior and patient satisfaction. Additionally, promoting community engagement and peer support can enhance health-seeking behavior. Peer support programs, such as support groups for individuals with chronic conditions or mental health disorders, can provide emotional support, encouragement, and practical advice to help individuals navigate the healthcare system and seek appropriate medical care. By fostering social connections and building relationships within communities, individuals are more likely to feel supported in their health-seeking behaviors and motivated to prioritize their health (Dunst et al., 2016).

Moreover, healthcare providers play a critical role in improving health-seeking behavior through patient-centered care. Patient-centered care emphasizes empathy, communication, and collaboration between providers and patients, ensuring that individuals feel respected, understood, and empowered to make decisions about their health. By fostering trust and open communication with patients, healthcare providers can encourage them to seek medical care promptly and follow through with treatment plans (Epstein et al., 2005). Research has shown that patient-centered care is associated with improved health outcomes and patient satisfaction. Lastly, policymakers and healthcare systems can implement policies and programs that support and incentivize health-seeking behavior. This includes promoting preventive care, screening programs, and health campaigns that raise awareness of common health issues and encourage individuals to seek regular medical check-ups. By investing in public health initiatives and healthcare infrastructure, policymakers can create a supportive environment that prioritizes and values individuals' health-seeking behaviors (Whetten et al., 2016). Research has shown that public health interventions can successfully increase health-seeking behavior and improve population health outcomes.

Materials and Methods

The design of this study was a survey research design. The study was conducted at the Ishiagu community, in the Ivo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State. Ishiagu is a town in Ivo local government area, in Ebonyi state, Nigeria, located on the plains of the south-eastern savannah belt. It is the location of the Federal College of Agriculture, Ishiagu. The scope of the study revolves around the impact of cultural factors on health-seeking behavior in Ebonyi State, South East, Nigeria: The Ishiagu-Ebonyi Exemplar. It also sets out to determine what could be done to address the situation. The population for the study will comprise all the inhabitants

living in Ishiagu, Ivo L.G.A. Ebonyi State. As of the period of the study, the population was 73,657 according to Population (2022). The sample size of 255 respondents was used for this study to represent various villages in Ishiagu, Ivo L.G.A. Ebonyi State. The simple random sampling technique was used for this study. The instrument used for data collection in this study was a self-developed structured questionnaire. The researcher adopted a Test Re-test method of reliability testing. The data gathered from the primary source through the aid of a questionnaire was presented in a tabular form and analyzed using percentages. The different responses were grouped and analyzed differently and the total percentage was determined.

Findings/Results

Out of the 255 copies of questionnaire administered to the respondents, only 232 copies were correctly filled, returned and used for quantitative analysis. However, 23 copies of the questionnaire were not returned, wrongly filled, discarded and were not included in the analysis. The results and findings of the study were presented in the tables below:

Research Question 1: What is the cultural factors influencing health seeking behavior in the Ishiagu community?

Table 1: Table showing cultural factors influencing health seeking behavior in the Ishiagu community

| S/N | Items on cultural factors influencing health-seeking | SA | A | SD | D | Total |
|-----|---|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------|
| 1 | Language and communication barriers influence health-seeking behavior | 110 (47.4%) | 53 (22.8%) | 47 (20.3%) | 22 (9.5%) | 232 |
| 2 | Values play a significant role in shaping health-seeking behavior | 94 (40.5%) | 77 (33.2%) | 12 (5.2%) | 49 (21.1%) | 232 |
| 3 | Cultures have specific rituals or traditional healing practices that are believed to be effective in treating illness | 144 (62.1%) | 53 (22.8%) | 4 (1.7%) | 31 (13.4%) | 232 |
| 4 | Some religious groups may have beliefs about the sanctity of life that affect decisions about end-of-life care | 47 (20.3%) | 49 (21.1%) | 78 (33.6%) | 58 (25%) | 232 |
| 5 | Individuals are more likely to seek care from traditional healers or engage in alternative medicine practices | 161 (69.4%) | 27 (11.6%) | 33 (14.2%) | 11 (4.7%) | 232 |

Source: Field Survey 2024

The Item 1 above revealed that 110 representing 47.4% of the respondents strongly agreed with the assertion that language and communication barriers influence health-seeking behavior in Ishiagu Community, 53 representing 22.8% of the respondents agreed with the assertion, while the 47 representing 20.3% of the respondents strongly disagreed with the assertion, 22 representing 9.5% of the respondents disagreed with the assertion. The implication of this is that language and communication barriers influence health-seeking behavior in Ishiagu Community.

Item 2 showed that 94 representing 40.5% of the respondents strongly agreed with the assertion that values play a significant role in shaping health-seeking behavior in Ishiagu Community, 77 representing 33.2% of the respondents agreed with the assertion, while the 12 representing

5.2% of the respondents strongly disagreed with the assertion, 49 representing 21.1% of the respondents disagreed with the assertion.

The third item revealed that 144 representing 62.1% of the respondents strongly agreed with the assertion that Cultures have specific rituals or traditional healing practices that are believed to be effective in treating illness in Ishiagu Community, 53 representing 22.8% of the respondents agreed with the assertion, 4 representing 1.7% of the respondents strongly disagreed with the assertion, while the remaining 31 representing 13.4% of the respondents disagreed with the assertion.

Item 4 under also revealed that 47 representing 20.3% of the respondents strongly agreed with the assertion that some religious groups may have beliefs about the sanctity of life that affect decisions about end-of-life care in Ishiagu Community, 49 representing 21.1% of the respondents agreed with the assertion, 78 representing 33.6% of the respondents strongly disagreed with the assertion, while the remaining 58 representing 25% of the respondents disagreed with the assertion.

Again, Item 5 from the above table showed that 161 representing 69.4% of the respondents strongly agreed with the assertion that Individuals are more likely to seek care from traditional healers or engage in alternative medicine practices in Ishiagu Community, 27 representing 11.6% of the respondents strongly agreed with the assertion, 33 representing 14.2% of the respondents strongly disagreed with the assertion, while the remaining 11 representing 4.7% of the respondents disagreed with the assertion.

Research Question 2: What measures could be taken to improve the health seeking behaviour among individuals in Ishiagu community?

Table 2: Table showing measures could be taken to improve the health seeking behaviour among individuals in Ishiagu community.

| S/N | Items on measures that could be taken to improve the health seeking behaviour | SA | A | SD | D | Total |
|-----|--|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|-------|
| 1 | Increasing health literacy, to understand and use health information to make informed decisions | 121 (52.2%) | 67 (28.9%) | 13 (5.6%) | 31 (13.4%) | 232 |
| 2 | Increasing access to healthcare services is important measure to improve health seeking | 117 (50.4%) | 59 (25.4%) | 21 (9.1%) | 35 (15.1%) | 232 |
| 3 | Strengthening the primary healthcare system is crucial for improving health seeking behaviors | 89 (38.4%) | 75 (32.3%) | 44 (19%) | 24 (10.3%) | 232 |
| 4 | Promoting community engagement in healthcare decision-making can also enhance health seeking behaviors | 133 (57.3%) | 41 (17.7%) | 29 (12.5%) | 29 (12.5%) | 232 |
| 5 | Social determinants of health is critical for improving health seeking behaviors | 94 (40.5%) | 77 (33.2%) | 12 (5.2%) | 49 (21.1%) | 232 |

Source: Field Survey 2024

Item 1 under table 2 revealed that 121 representing 52.2% of the respondents strongly agreed with the assertion that increasing health literacy, to understand and use health information to make informed decisions, 67 representing 28.9% of the respondents agreed with the assertion, 13 representing 5.6% of the respondents strongly disagreed with the assertion, while the 31 representing 13.4% of the respondents disagreed with the assertion. The implication of this is

that increasing health literacy, to understand and use health information to make informed decisions.

Item 2 above showed that 117 representing 50.4% of the respondents strongly agreed with the assertion that increasing access to healthcare services is important measure to improve health seeking, 59 representing 25.4% of the respondents agreed with the assertion, 21 representing 9.1% of the respondents strongly disagreed with the assertion, while the 35 representing 15.1% of the respondents disagreed with the assertion.

The item 3 revealed that 89 representing 38.4% of the respondents strongly agreed with the assertion that strengthening the primary healthcare system is crucial for improving health seeking behaviors, 75 representing 32.3% of the respondents agreed with the assertion, 44 representing 19% of the respondents strongly disagreed with the assertion, while the remaining 24 representing 10.3% of the respondents disagreed with the assertion.

Item 4 showed that 133 representing 57.3% of the respondents strongly agreed with the assertion that promoting community engagement in healthcare decision-making can also enhance health seeking behaviors, 41 representing 17.7% of the respondents agreed with the assertion, 29 representing 12.5% of the respondents strongly disagreed with the assertion, while the remaining 29 representing 12.5% of the respondents disagreed with the assertion.

Again, item 5 showed that 94 representing 40.5% of the respondents strongly agreed with the assertion that social determinants of health is critical for improving health seeking behaviors, 77 representing 33.2% of the respondents agreed with the assertion, while the 12 representing 5.2% of the respondents strongly disagreed with the assertion, 49 representing 21.1% of the respondents disagreed with the assertion.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that the health seeking behavior can be influenced by a myriad of cultural factors, such as beliefs, values, traditions, and social norms within Ishiagu community or group. These cultural factors play a significant role in shaping individuals' attitudes towards seeking healthcare services and can impact their decision-making process when it comes to addressing their health concerns. This finding of the study is also consistent with Danso-Appiah et al, (2010) discovery which revealed that one of the most important determinants of seeking health care or inviting a health facility is perceived severity of symptoms.

The findings of this study also revealed that by implementing measures such as promoting information literacy skills, fostering curiosity and a growth mindset, providing access to diverse sources of information, leveraging technology, and fostering a culture of continuous learning, organizations can empower individuals to seek out relevant information effectively. By enhancing seeking behavior, individuals can make more informed decisions, solve problems more efficiently, and contribute to the overall success of their organizations. This finding is similar to the study of Kaplan (2018) which showed that individuals with higher levels of curiosity are more likely to engage in seeking behavior and learning opportunities. By fostering a culture of curiosity and encouraging individuals to explore new ideas and perspectives, organizations can stimulate individuals' desire to seek out information proactively. Similarly, promoting a growth mindset – the belief that abilities can be developed through effort and perseverance – can empower individuals to overcome challenges and persist in seeking information (Kaplan, 2018).

Conclusion

This study has provided valuable insights into the impact of cultural and behavioural factors on health-seeking behavior in Nigeria. The findings highlight the complex interplay between cultural factors, such as beliefs and practices, and behavioral factors, such as access to healthcare services. By examining the Ishiagu community's health-seeking behavior, this study contributes to the understanding of the influence of cultural factors on healthcare seeking behavior in Nigerian communities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made;

Enhancing access to healthcare services: Ensuring the availability of healthcare services, including healthcare facilities, trained healthcare professionals, and adequate medications, can reduce barriers to health seeking behavior.

Providing health education: Developing and implementing comprehensive health education programs that address cultural factors and address specific health issues within the community can improve individuals' knowledge and decision-making regarding their health.

Empowering community leaders: Engaging community leaders and influencers in health education efforts can amplify the message and promote health seeking behavior within the community.

Promoting social accountability: Encouraging social accountability, such as peer education and support groups, can empower individuals to share their experiences and seek healthcare when needed.

Collaboration with government agencies: Collaborating with government agencies and policymakers can ensure that health seeking behavior initiatives are aligned with the community's needs and priorities.

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