

February 2016

ELDERLY PEOPLE AND THEIR INFORMATION NEEDS

Nelson Edewor

Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun, Nigeria, nedewor@yahoo.com

Osaze Patrick Ijiekhuamhen

sazepatrick@gmail.com

Uche P. Emeka-ukwu

pat_anene@yahoo.com

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Edewor, Nelson; Ijiekhuamhen, Osaze Patrick; and Emeka-ukwu, Uche P., "ELDERLY PEOPLE AND THEIR INFORMATION NEEDS" (2016). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 1332.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/1332>

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Osaze Patrick Ijiekhuamhen

University Library

Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Nigeria

sazepatrick@gmail.com

Nelson Edewor

Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Nigeria

nedewor@yahoo.com

Uche Emeka-Ukwu

University Library

Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Nigeria

pat_anene@yahoo.com

Dennis E. Egreajena

College of Education Library, Warri

Abstract

This study is aimed at exploring the information behavior of the elderly people amongst us. A survey research design was adopted. Four objectives were set for the study and the interview was used to elicit information from respondents. Findings showed that 63% were male while 37% were female. Findings also reveal that the information needs of elders covered health conditions (98%), pension/finance (92%), government policies (34%), current affairs (53%), and transport (63%) among others. The most preferred source of information as revealed by the study is the use of family members (98%). This is followed by radio/television (92%). Use of information to solve health issues (92%) topped the list of the use of information by the elderly. Factors affecting information seeking behavior of the elderly include, problem of equity in information materials (97%), inadequate fund (91%), lack of access to information (35%), and lack of suitable reading material (80%). The paper concludes that publishers should take into consideration the elderly population amongst us, thereby publishing suitable reading (bold print) materials. Recommendations were put forward to enhance access to information by the elderly.

Keywords: information use, elders, information behavior, information needs

Introduction

A common focus of the information behaviour literature is on how the target populations seek and use information to meet their need. Information seeking behaviour deals with the psychological behaviour of the seeker, which involves the searching, locating, retrieving and using of information (Karunarathna, 2008).

Everyone needs information to survive and strive in this 21st century, just as doctors need information to treat patients, lawyers to handle cases, teachers need information to prepare lesson notes, teach their students and prepare them for a career ahead of them, the elderly also requires much information to stay healthy, make informed choices and to remain current with news and happenings around them. The information needs of the elderly population, particularly in rural areas, have scarcely been investigated by researchers and are very poorly covered in the literatures of information science (Zou & Zhou, 2014).

According to WHO (2015) most developed countries of the world have accepted the chronological age of 65 years as a definition of elderly or older person. It is well known that the world's population is ageing, with more developed regions leading this trend. This is due to

increasing survival to older ages as well as smaller numbers of birth (United Nations Population Division, 1998). In some parts of Nigeria, most frail elderly people lived in the community supported by family and friends. In the United States for example, the older population--persons 65 years or older--numbered 39.6 million .They represented 12.9% of the U.S. population, about one in every eight Americans. By 2030, there will be about 72.1 million older persons, more than twice their number in 2000. (U.S Department of Health and Human Services, 2012).

The elderly are usually inquisitive and this prompts their search for information. They want to know more about their health condition, current happenings around them, technologies that could assist them etc. Bruce (2005) states that, "information plays a significant role in our daily professional and personal lives and we are constantly challenged to take charge of the information that we need for work, fun and everyday decisions and tasks". The elderly like their younger counterparts requires information to meet their day-to-day needs. This study is therefore aimed at determining the information seeking behaviour of the elderly with a view to improving their searching skills, identify the challenges they face while searching for information and proffer possible solutions to them.

Objectives of the Study

This study sought to establish ways of enhancing the information- seeking behaviour of the elderly. To attain this goal, the study stipulated the following objectives:

- To find out the sources of information the elderly are familiar with.
- To identify their information needs.
- To know the use they put the information obtained.
- To establish the problems that the elderly encounter in information seeking.

Research Questions

For the purpose of this research, the following questions have been formulated:

- What are the sources of information the elderly are familiar with?
- What are the information needs of the elderly?
- To what use the elderly put the information they obtained.
- What are the factors militating against the available and accessibility of information by the elderly?

Literature Review

The concept of aging is multifaceted; this is because there are chronological, biological, psychological, and social, functional dimensions of aging (Papalia, Feldman, & Camp, 2002; Hoyer & Roodin, 2003). Nigeria as the most populous country in Africa, currently have the highest number of aged or elderly people in Africa (Kinsella & Velkoff, 2001). As the largest population in Africa and the ninth in the world, it is estimated that by the year 2025 the population of Nigerians aged 60 and above will constitute 6percent of the entire population (Gesinde, Adedapo & Charles, 2011).

Projected Population Ageing in Africa, West African and Nigeria

Region	Population 60+ (percent)	Population 60+ (millions)
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	2005	2025	2050	2005	2025	2050
Africa	5.2	6.4	10.0	47.4	85.8	19.9
West Africa	4.7	5.5	9.0	12.0	21.8	51.6
Nigeria	4.9	6.0	9.9	6.4	11.5	25.5

Source:UNPopulationDivision(2005)

Attempts have been made by scholars to explain through theoretical postulations, factors responsible for aging. There are wear and tear, genetic, and cellular theories of aging (Gesinde, Adedapo & Charles, 2011).

The study of information needs and seeking behavior dates back to 1948 when Bernal and others presented a paper on scientific information at the 1948 Royal Society conference (Bernal, 1960). During the past 30 years or so, a considerable body of literature has been produced dealing with information needs and information-seeking behavior of both individuals and groups in a variety of contexts (Anwar, Al-Ansari & Abdullah, 2004). An information need is recognition that one's knowledge is inadequate to satisfy a goal (LISWiki, 2015). Information needs leads to search and demand for information to meet the required gap. According to Wilson (2000), information-seeking behavior includes those activities a person may engage in when identifying their own needs for information, searching for such information in any way, and using or transferring that information.

A lot of studies have been conducted on the information seeking behaviour of the elderly in the Western world. Wick (2004) performed an exhaustive literature review of research on the information seeking behaviour of seniors. He reports that seniors rely on interpersonal sources together with internally- produced print materials for their information needs regarding participation in community clubs and organization. He find out that the elderly sought print resources for hobby- related information seeking, for answers to medical and financial questions, they look primarily to interpersonal sources, which include physicians, pharmacists, other

professionals, family members and friends. Campbell and Nolfi (2005), noted in his study that the elderly adults were willing to use the internet as a starting point for general information, but when it comes to making informed decisions about their health care, the majority adhered to a physician- centered care model.

Barrett (2000) investigated the real information needs of seniors in UK. Several interesting results have been obtained. First, the elderly participants demonstrated a general lack of awareness of the vast amount of information on practical help, services, health, benefits and equipment available to them and how to access it. Secondly, this group of respondents has information needs in three specific information areas: financial and practical help, how to adapt to their homes and the products available to make life easier at home, whom to contact for advice on all these matters. A large Majority of the respondents wanted to be told where they could get this information locally. In other words, Barret study identified finance and benefits, community care (support, services and practical help at home, and housing as major areas of information needs for the elderly people. Williamson (1995), found out in his research of 202 older persons, that the most important information needs were health, income and finance followed by recreation, government policies for them, consumer and housing/ accommodation. Information needs and demand are two different concepts, which move simultaneously, where there is a need, there must be a demand and when a person demands for information, it means he/she wants to satisfy an information need. The elderly have a lot of information needs, which prompted their demand for information. According to the study by Dinet and Vivian (2009), the elderly demand information from the web to meet their information needs. Guidarini (2012) in his article "living large: The continuing need for large print materials" noted that the elderly depend on large print materials in demanding for information to meet their needs. After getting the required information, the elderly would use the information to make better choices and have a good understanding of a particular area of life.

Studying the information needs of elders and disseminating findings of such study will be of immense value to government in formulating policies for the elderly in this country. Therefore there is the need for increased attention to the roles of the elderly in our society. This has necessitated this study. There is relative dearth of literature on the information needs and seeking behavior of the elderly in Nigeria. Thus this study is an attempt to fill this gap by identifying the information needs of the elderly in Igueben Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria, and suggest possible ways of resolving identified challenges.

Methodology

This study adopts a survey research design. The instrument used for data collection in this study was a structured interview and questionnaires by the researchers and three research assistants who were trained on how to distribute the questionnaires across the wards. Edo central comprises a total of 33,499 elderly people ages 65 years and above. Ekpoma, Igueben, Irrua, Ubiaja and Uromi are the five local governments in Edo Central. Igueben local government has a total of 6112 elderly people (National Population Commission, 2012). Three hundred and fifty persons (65 years and above) were selected by systematic random sampling from Igueben Local government area. The Local government has ten wards under it, Igueben town ward 1-4, Ahmahor ward 5, Ebelle ward 6-7, Udo ward 8, Ewossa ward 9 and Ekpon ward 10. The interview was conducted in this manner: Igueben Town 100 elderly, Ahmahor 50 elderly, Ebelle 50 elderly, Udo 50 elderly, Ewossa 50 elderly and Ekpon 50 elderly respectively. Out of the 350 elderly persons interviewed, the researchers were able to get the required information for analysis from 338 elderly people, thus, there was 97% response rate.

Research Findings and Discussion

Fig 1: Distribution of respondent by sex

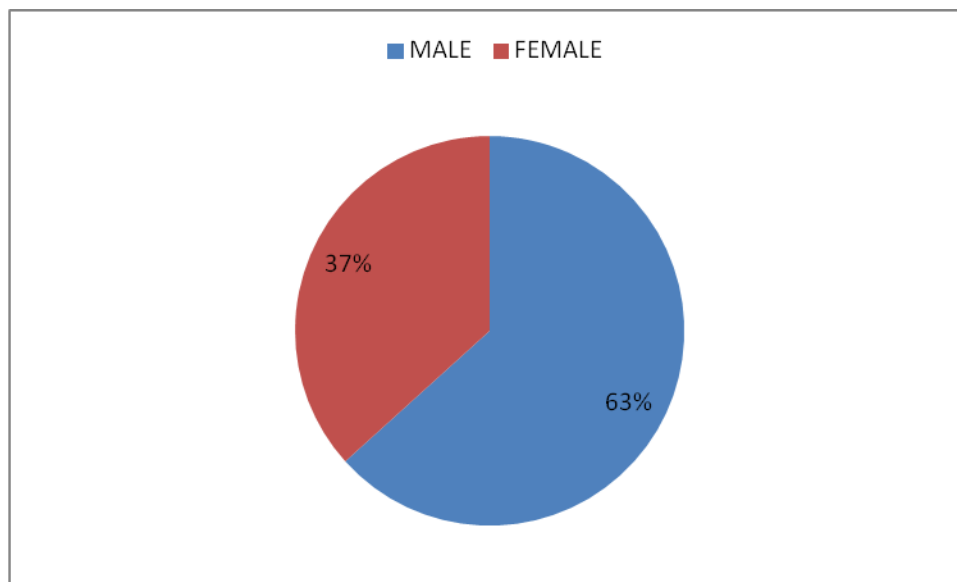


Fig. 1 shows that (63%) of the respondents were male while 37% were female. This represents the gender distribution of elderly involved in the survey.

Fig. 2: Population of the Elderly Interviewed by community

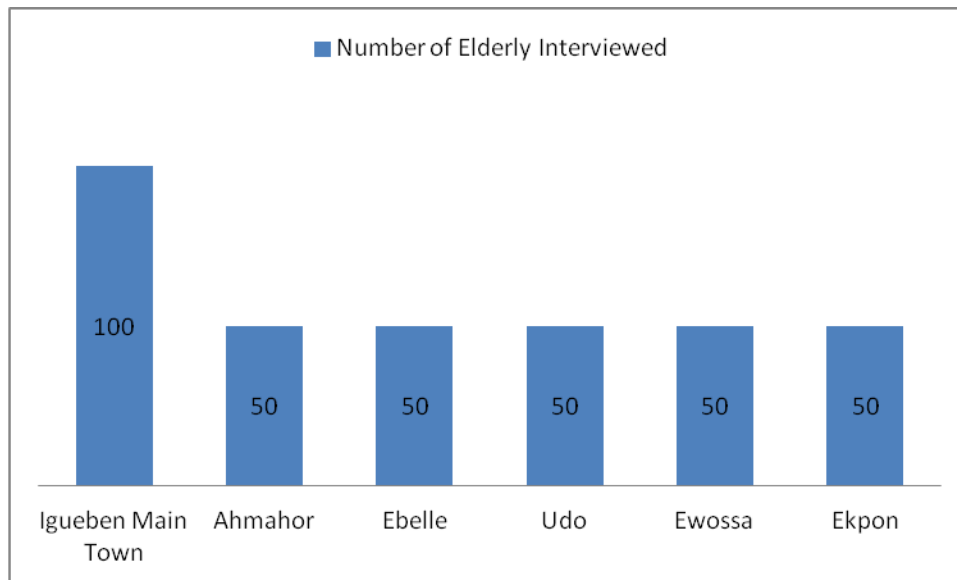
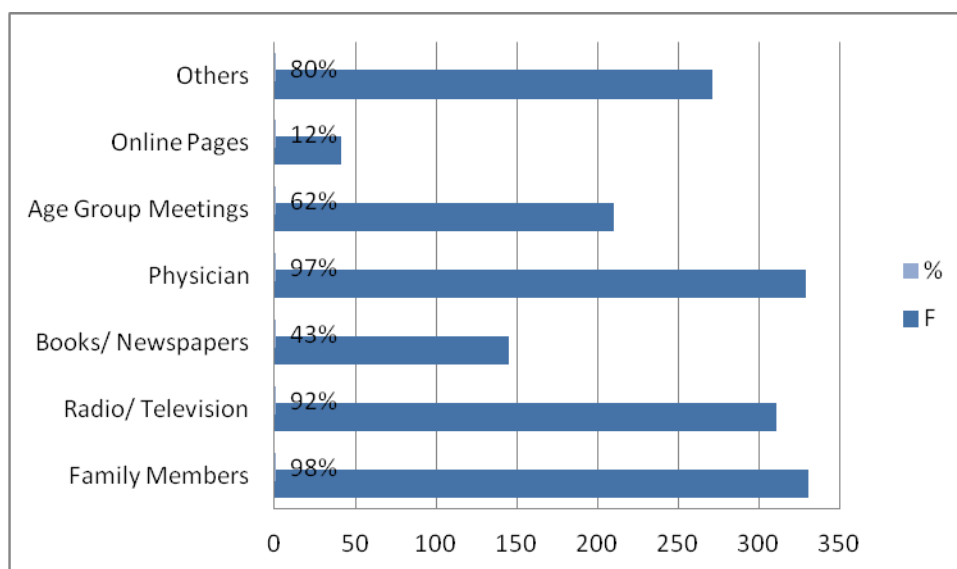


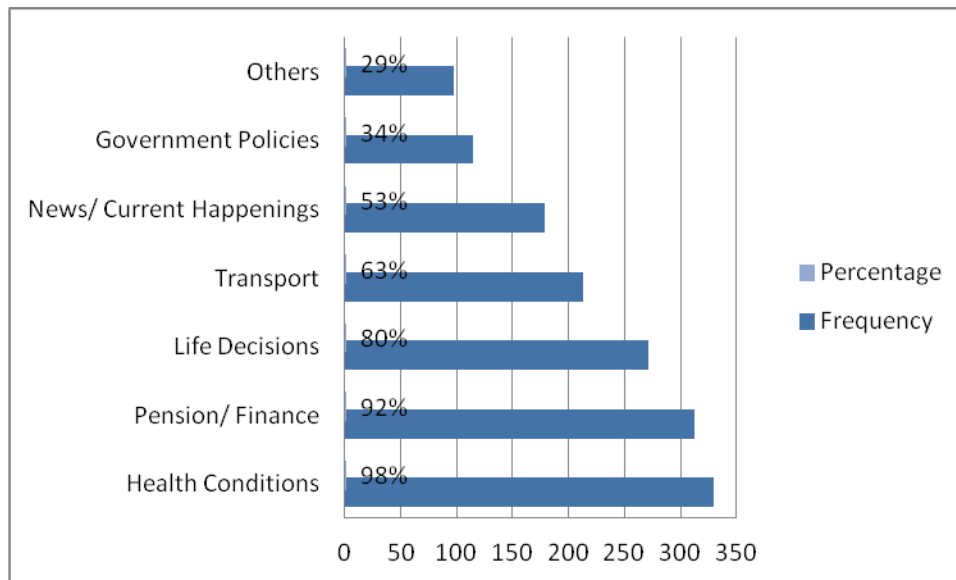
Fig. 2: Shows that 100 elderly people were interviewed from Igueben main town, 50 elderly people from Ahmahor, 50 elderly people from Ebelle, 50 elderly people from Udo, 50 elderly people from Ewossa and 50 elderly people from Ekpon respectively.

Fig. 3: Source of Information used by the Elderly people



Results in **Fig 3**, shows that 98% of the respondents used family members as their information source, 92% radio/television, 43% books/ newspapers, 97% physician, 62% age group meetings, 12% online pages, 80% other information sources.

Fig 4: Information Needs of the Elderly people



As indicated in **Fig. 4**, 98% of respondent's information is health condition, 92% pension/ finance, 80% life decisions, 63% transport, 53% news/ current happenings, 34% government policies, 29% other information needs.

Fig 5: Demand of Information

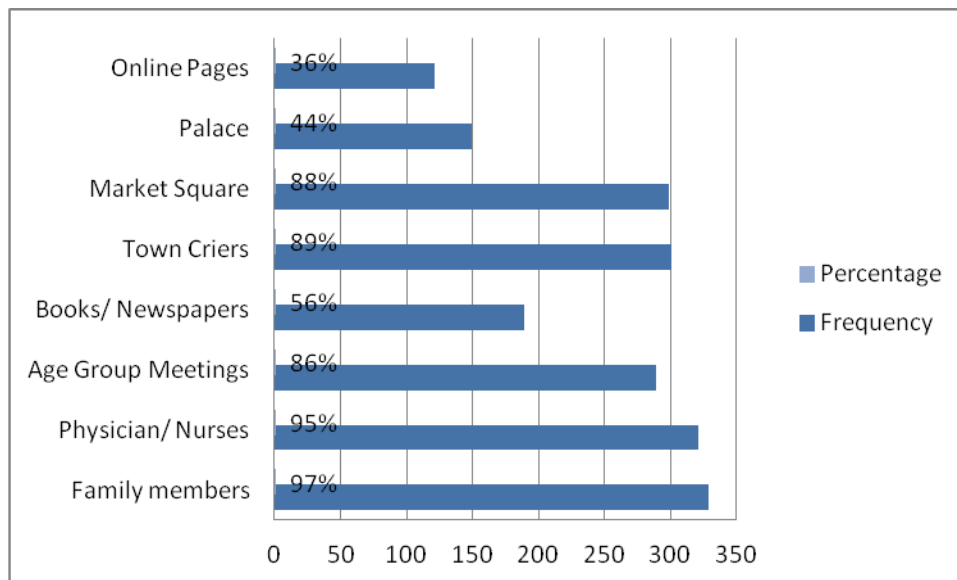


Fig. 5 shows that 97% of respondents demand for information from family members, 95% physician/nurses, 86% age group meetings, 56% books/ newspapers, 89% town criers, 88% market square, 44% palace, 36% online pages.

Fig 6: Use of Information by the Elderly people

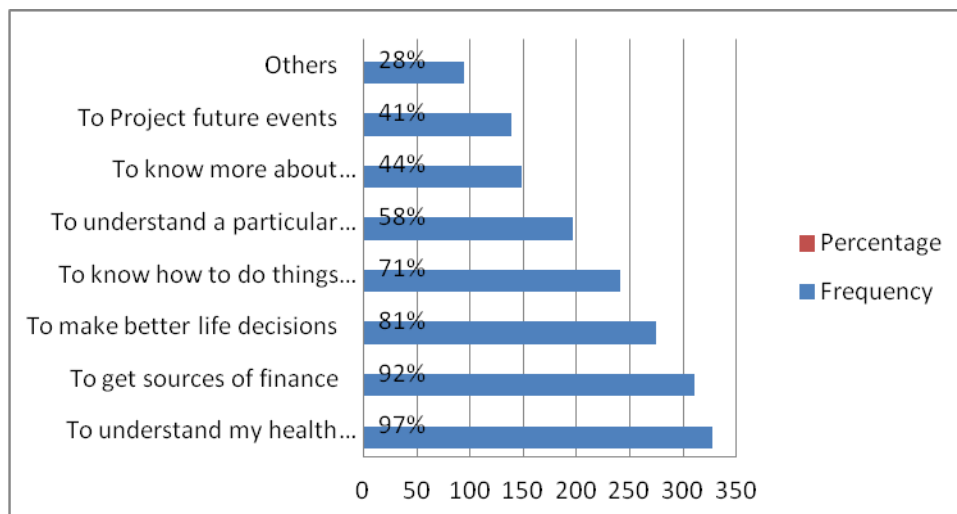
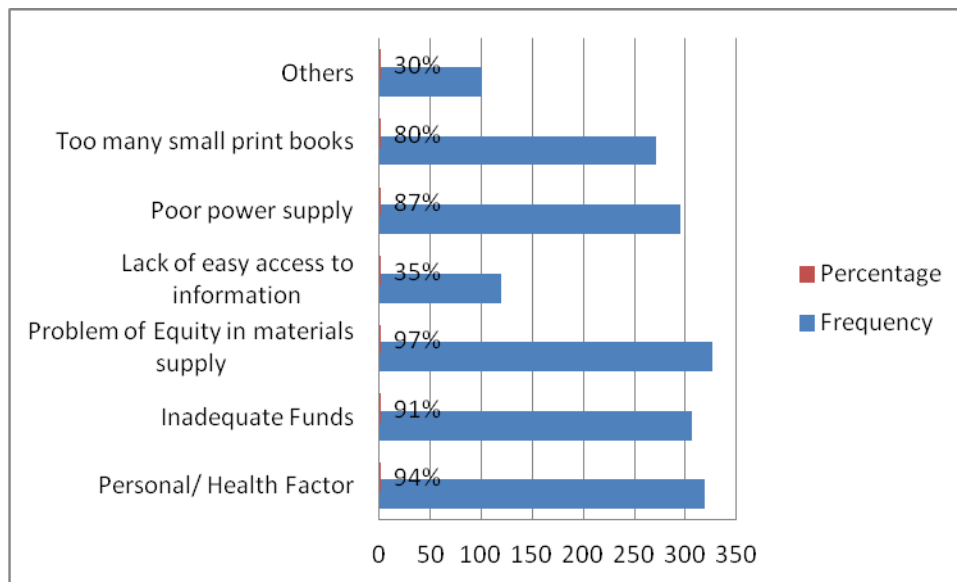


Fig. 6, revealed that 97% use information to understand their health better, 92% to get source of finance, 81% to make better life decisions, 71% to know how to do things easily, 58% to understand a particular situation, 44% to know more about government policies, 41% to project future events, 28% others.

Fig 7: Factors affecting the information seeking behaviour of the Elder people



From **Fig 7**, it is clear that the factors affecting the elderly information seeking behaviour is Problem of equity in materials supply with 97%, 91% inadequate funds, 35% lack of easy access to information, 35% problem of equity in materials supply, 87% poor power supply, 80% too many small print books, 30% other factors.

The distribution of respondents by sex in **Fig 1** shows that they were 214 (63%) men and 124(37%) women that took part in the research. The study in **Fig 2** indicated that family members (98%) was the major source of information for the elderly and this did not agree with the study of Campbell and Nolfi (2005) that the elderly are willing to use the internet as a first point of call for information seeking. The findings in **Fig 3** showed that major information needs of the elderly was health condition with 98%, the study is in consonance with Williamson, (1995), found out in his research of 202 older persons, that the most important information needs were health, income and finance. Pension and finance 92%, life decision 80%, transport 63%. The results in **Fig 4** revealed that the elderly demand for information from family members with 97%, 95% physician/ nurses, 86% age group meetings, 56% books/ newspapers. **Fig 5** shows that the elderly use the information they get to understand their health better with 97%, 92% to get source of finance, 81% to make better life decisions, 71% to know how to do things easily etc. In **Fig 6**, the major factor affecting the information seeking behaviour of the elderly in Igueben Local Government, Area is the problem of equity in materials supply with 97% and this is in agreement with the research of Atinmo (2000) he spotted the problem of equity in the provision of reading materials for the elderly visually impaired and their sighted counterparts, the

lack of adequate large prints publishers (if any) in Nigeria and lack of provisions of funds for the purchase of adequate information resources for the elderly in Nigeria to ease their access to information.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Certain conclusion can be drawn from the study: the elderly in Igueben Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria knows the importance of information as majority of the older adult use family members as their major source of information. They use information to understand their health better and source for finance for their up keep among others. Factors' affecting the elderly information seeking behaviour in Nigeria is similar to other aged in other parts of the world, in this study we identified some factors which includes the problem of equity in material availability, personal/ health factors, inadequate funds among others. In view of the foregoing, the following recommendations are made:

- There should be equity in the supply of materials, when publishing the elderly population should be put into consideration.
- Large prints and pictorial materials should be acquired for the elderly by libraries.
- Government should formulate elderly centered policies; this will enhance their living standards in Nigeria.
- Pension, gratuity and other funds for the elderly should not be withheld for any reason because at this stage of their life they need more funds to stay alive.
- Public libraries should dedicate a section for the elderly, with large print books and other electronic resources that would be easy to use by the elderly.
- Family members should be patient with the elderly; they should be ready to pass information to them from time to time to keep them current.
- Elderly persons should never be left isolated, showing love to them goes a long way in keep them healthy.
- There should be at least one accessible community hospital in all rural communities in Nigeria; this would ease the elderly communication with medical practitioners.
- Media houses should organize programmes that would assist the elderly to be informed, healthy and joyful.

- The elderly in rural areas should be encouraged to use electronic gadgets as this can help in their recreational reading, as all newspapers published in Nigeria are online.
- Training programmes should be organized for librarians so that they can be more effective in meeting the information needs of the elderly.

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