



AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION/ CUTTING AMONG MALES IN OWERRI METROPOLIS

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ABSTRACT

The problem of female genital mutilation and cutting has continued to rampage and be a source of worry to many communities in Nigeria despite efforts and campaigns to address this practice. Considering that Nigeria and specifically Imo state is a patriarchal society, this study sought to measure the level of awareness and knowledge of female genital mutilation/cutting among males in Owerri Metropolis. Framed on the agenda setting theory, this study employed the survey approach to sample 384 married male respondents in the area of study. Findings revealed that the level of awareness among males in Owerri Metropolis residents is quite high, and also knowledge about female circumcision is through mostly the radio and internet. The study therefore recommends aggressive use of the mass media as medium of disseminating information and message about health related programmes in Owerri metropolis. Such frequent reportage will assist stakeholders and partners in the health sector to achieve the desired goals of reaching out to the actual people for whom such programmes are intended for, and for whom a certain behavioral change is sought.

Keywords: Awareness, knowledge, females, genital mutilation, cutting, males, Owerri metropolis,

Introduction

Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGMC) can be generally understood to mean all procedures which involve partial or total removal of the external female genital and or causing injury to the female genital parts. According to (Okeke, Anyachie&Ezenyeaka, 2012), such removal may be culturally related or for non-therapeutic reasons. In African in general and Nigeria in particular, women and girls are usually subjected to inhumane, unhealthy and life threatening traditional practices under different guises. Such blatant violation of their fundamental human right is justified by cultural beliefs and stereotypical embargos over the years.

One of such dehumanizing practices is Female genital mutilation/cutting. From research, FGM/C has resulted in some form of inequality between male and female and has blatantly infringed on women

and girls right to health, freedom from torture and cruelty, exclusion from inhuman treatment and life threatening procedures under the guise of conforming to cultural beliefs.

In recent times, many countries have realized their folly and thus the renewed bid to eradicate such barbaric practices through integrative communication as intervention and behavioral change is necessary to protect girls, ladies and women from the barbaric practice of female genital mutilation/cutting. According to Alexander, 2005; Thomson, 2006 in Hajara, (2014), communication is therefore, very vital for behavior change to take place because public health programmes invariably change cannot occur if the specific target audience is not aware of the messages disseminated to them. That being the case, the media becomes a major stakeholder in any public health situation as they serve as not only a viable source of information and a strong link between health workers and the public, but also advocates for appropriate health behaviors in the society. Health-related authorities educate and entrust the media with essential health information which is then, relayed to the public in formats that can be easily accessed through a variety of media channels at their disposal. Deance, et al (2002), cited in Oyero and Areoyo (2007, p.366), notes that the “mass media’s, media, television, newspapers and magazines are fundamental to development. They enable the people to learn about issues and make their voices heard”. They can exert a powerful influence for good purposes or for ill purposes as the case may be. Such exposure to mass media provides increased awareness and knowledge, as well as attitudinal change, change in social norms and behaviours that possibly may lead to positive public health outcomes.

In Imo State, there has been series of health programmes on Boss Radio, Orient FM, Darling FM and Ozisa FM to address this practice. It is against the backdrop of e aforementioned that the study investigates the level of awareness and knowledge of female genital mutilation/ cutting among males in Owerri metropolis. The decision to focus on males bothers on the fact that Nigeria is a largely patriarchal society where most decisions are taken by the man. If men are against the practice, then it will to a large extent reduce in homes and communities.

Research aim

The mass media informs, educates, entertains, persuades and mobilizes amongst other functions. This means that those who are exposed to media contents are aware and knowledgeable of issues, and such knowledge contributes significantly to attitudinal change of the media consumers. It then goes to show that that a key issue in the fight against the practice of female genital mutilation/cutting is information. To this end, media content creators and producers have disseminated information regarding and towards abolishment of this practice.

Despite this fact, it appears that the battle against female genital mutilation/cutting is far from over. This realization prompted the researchers to focus on the males to ascertain if they are knowledgeable about FGM/C and how they can become agents of change in their homes and communities at large. Thus, it becomes necessary to ascertain the level of awareness and knowledge on the fight against female genital mutilation among males, and whether exposure to media programmes on health influences males’ conviction and participation in the fight against female genital mutilation/ cutting. Specifically, the study sought to ascertain the level of awareness and knowledge of female genital mutilation and cutting among males in Owerri metropolis.

Theoretical Underpinning

This study was hinged on agenda setting theory. Agenda setting theory emerged from communication and media studies, and directs attention on mass media influence on setting political agenda. While the theory may be considered a political theory, it does not negate the fact that by disseminating an issue, it becomes topical. If the media talk about female genital mutilation/cutting, then it becomes a food for thought for

those directly or indirectly exposed to the media content. This was captured in the words of Orji-Egwu (2012) who opine that:

The press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about. And it follows from this that not only on their personal interest, but also on the map that is drawn for them by the writers, editors, and publishers of the paper they read.

This theory advocates that media consumers are not only exposed to issues but also gauge the level of importance to attach to an issue. For instance, with the level of attention given to health issues like exclusive breastfeeding and genital mutilation and cutting, it will likely be a topic of discussion and consideration during men's hangouts which may likely initiate the process of attitudinal change. The relevance of this theory to the study is that female genital mutilation/cutting, if and when prominently covered, is likely to be considered most important by media consumers. The implication is that many of the media consumers will likely be spurred into taking the desired action.

METHODS

The researchers employed the survey research method for this study as it provided the platform to ask direct and specific questions that are considered pertinent to the study. The survey approach gave the researchers the opportunity to measure the behaviours, views and feelings of males towards eradicating female genital mutilation/ cutting in Owerri metropolis. For Ohaja (2003), survey "is a study of the characteristics of sample through questioning that enables a research to make generalization concerning his population of interest". Another justification for the choice of survey lies in the well-defined advantage as Wimmer and Dominick (2000) cited in Owuamalam (2012, p.124) observe that survey can be used to investigate problems in realistic setting cost of surveys is responsible, considering the amount of information/data gathered.

Coming to area of study, the study was carried out in some selected communities in Owerri metropolis. Imo State, Nigeria. Owerri Metropolis consists of Owerri Municipal Council which has 11 wards; Owerri North has 12 wards and Owerri West with 10 wards. Owerri Metropolis has 33 wards. It is the urban and semi-urban city of the capital of Imo state.

The population of the study consists of married men in Owerri metropolis between 30 to 79 years and above. From the projected population of 183,800 calculated from 133,189 (2016 census figure of NPC 2016), a sample size of 384 was arrived at using the Wimmer & Dominick online calculator. Multi stage sampling technique was used from the local government level to ward level and to the individual respondent's level. The instrument of data collection was a structured close ended questionnaire constructed to capture the major research objectives while simple percentage was used to analyze quantitative data.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Data analysis was based on 368 copies of valid copies of the questionnaire out of 384 distributed. The presentation was done under the following sub headings:

- ❖ Marital status of respondents
- ❖ Awareness of female genital mutilation/cutting
- ❖ Knowledge of female genital mutilation/ cutting

Table 1: Marital Status of Respondents

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	247	67%
Widower	70	19%
Divorced	51	14%
Total	368	100%

Source: field survey 2022

On the marital status of the respondents, 247 representing 67% were married, 70 or 19% were widower and 51 or 14% were divorced. It means that majority of the respondents were married. The high level of currently married respondents were mainly coincidental and not purposive in anyway

Research Question One: What is the level of awareness about female genital mutilation/cutting among males in Owerri metropolis?

To determine the level of awareness, the respondents were asked if they have heard about FGM/C to which 199 representing 54% affirmed. It can then be concluded that majority of the respondents are aware of female genital mutilation and cutting. Probing further, the researchers sought to know their source of information and the result was as follows:

Television: 75 (20%)

Radio: 127 (34%)

Newspaper/Magazine: 28 (8%)

Internet: 99(27%)

Peers: 39 (11%)

From the above data, the radio is the dominant source of information about female genital mutilation/cutting followed by Internet and peers. It also goes to prove that radio is a veritable tool for social change. Going further and in answer to the first research question on level of awareness, data is presented thus:

Table 2: Respondents' Level of awareness on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting

Options	Frequency	Percentage
High	174	47%
Moderate	74	20%
Low	35	10%
Can't say	85	23%
Total	368	100%

Source: Field survey, 2022

From the above table, 174 representing 47% agreed that their level of awareness on female genital mutilation and cutting are high, 20% said moderate, 10% said low while 23% could not say. This shows that majority of the respondents are aware of female genital mutilation and cutting extensively.

The data presented indicates that majority or 34% and 27% of the respondents listen to radio and browse the internet to a significantly large extent. This conclusion was drawn from the 47% and 54% of the respondents who were aware of female genital mutilation/ cutting through radio and internet. By implication, majority of the respondents were exposed to the programme to a large extent as they were aware of maternal and child care practices, in responding to research question one. At this point, the agenda setting theory is called up as it advocates that media audience not only learn about public issues and other matters through the media, but also learn about the level of importance to attach to an issue or topic from the emphasis the mass media places on it. In relation to this study, constant reportage about health related issues like female genital mutilation and cutting by the mass media will spur the people into taking action regarding health issues.

This is in consonance with the findings of Nkwam-Uwaoma et al (2019) in their study revealed that there are moderate awareness and knowledge level amongst women in Imo State about FGM/C. this goes to show that in Imo state, both men and women are largely aware of Female genital mutilation and cutting. This finding has set the way to gauge their knowledge level and perception of the health issue under study.

Research Question Two: To what extent are the residents of Owerri metropolis knowledgeable about female genital mutilation and cutting?

To answer this second question, respondents were asked many questions to truly gauge their knowledge of FGM/C. One of such questions was if they can marry a circumcised woman to which 114 representing 31% of the respondents responded in the positive. 98 (26%) out rightly declined while 158 (43%) were uncertain. Their uncertainty may be as a result of the information at their disposal and possibly their level of knowledge.

Furthermore, the respondents were asked if FGM/C causes diseases and their responses were presented below:

Table 3: Response on if Female Genital Mutilation and Cutting Can Cause Diseases

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	190	52%
Agree	114	31%
Undecided	32	9%
Disagree	13	3%
Strongly Disagree	19	5%
Total	368	100%

Source: Field survey, 2022

The above table shows that 190 representing 52% of the respondents strongly agree that female genital mutilation and cutting can cause diseases, 114 or 31% agreed. This shows that majority of the respondents believed female genital mutilation and cutting can cause diseases.

In the same vein, the researchers decided to know their thoughts on a popular thinking in the State that FGM/C makes a woman less sexually active. The answer to our question was presented in table 4.

Table 4: Mutilation of female genital parts can make women less promiscuous?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	174	47%
Agree	124	34%
Undecided	32	9%
Disagree	25	7%
Strongly Disagree	13	3%
Total	368	100%

Source: Field survey, 2022

The above table shows that 174 representing 47% of the respondents strongly agree that mutilation of female genital parts can make women less promiscuous, 124 or 34% also agreed. This shows that majority of the respondents believed mutilation of female genital parts can make women less promiscuous. This finding is significant as it may explain why the practice is still on the increase despite the widespread campaign and level of knowledge.

Probing further, the researchers asked their opinion on possible psychological problems of women as a result of the circumcision. The responses are presented below:

Table 5: Lack of sexual pleasure for women due to FGM/C can cause psychological problems?

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	180	49%
Agree	124	34%
Undecided	32	9%
Disagree	13	3%
Strongly Disagree	19	5%
Total	368	100%

Source: Field survey, 2022

The above table shows that 180 representing 49% of the respondents strongly agree that Lack of sexual pleasure for women due to FGM/C can cause psychological problems, 124 or 34% also agreed. This shows that majority of the respondents believed Lack of sexual pleasure for women due to FGM/C can cause psychological problems. If that is the case, what do they think about circumcision generally?

Going by the data presented above, 43% representing majority of the respondents are not sure if they can marry a circumcised woman, 52% and 31 of the respondents strongly agree that female genital mutilation and cutting can cause diseases, 47% and 34% of the respondents strongly agree that mutilation of female genital parts can make women less promiscuous; 49% and 34% of the respondents strongly agree that Lack of sexual pleasure for women due to FGM/C can cause psychological problems, This

shows that majority of the respondents believed Lack of sexual pleasure for women due to FGM/C can cause psychological problems.

This means that males in Owerri Metropolis believed that radio and internet which is their preferred medium has help in enhancing their knowledge about the fight against female genital mutilation and cutting as well as persuades them to abstain from the practice of female genital mutilation. This finding was further justified in a study conducted by Hajara (2014).He found that pregnant women demonstrated good knowledge and awareness of antenatal care services.

Similarly Okeke et al,(2012) posits that female genital mutilation result to pain and hemorrhage, infection, acute urinary retention following such trauma, damage to the urethra or arms in the struggle of the victim during the procedure making the extent of the operation dictated in many cases by chance, chronic pelvic infection, acquired gynatresia resulting in hematocolpos, vulva adhesions, dymenorhea, retention cysts, and sexual difficulties with anagrams. Other complications are implantation dermoid cysts and keloids sexual dysfunction. This goes to prove the dangers circumcision exposes girls and women to.

Summary and Conclusion

In summary, the findings of this study is that the level of awareness of female genital mutilation/cutting among males in Owerri metropolis is quite high. Again, the surveyed males are of the belief that most of their knowledge on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting came from the radio followed closely by the internet.

Implications and recommendations of study

Following the findings of this study, it can be implied that the awareness and success of health intervention in Owerri metropolis is highly dependent on the level of dissemination on radio and internet. Thus, subsequent interventions should engage the radio as partners towards creating awareness and educating the public on the desired behavioral change.

Therefore, the study recommends aggressive use of the mass media as medium of disseminating information and message about health related programmes in Owerri metropolis. Such frequent reportage will assist stakeholders and partners in the health sector to achieve the desired goals of reaching out to the actual people for whom such programmes are intended for, and for whom a certain behavioral change is sought.

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