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AWARENESS AND HEALTH INFORMATION ON HANDWASHING AND HYGIENE FOR HEALTH SUSTAINABILITY IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT
It is every child's right to be protected against diseases and harm. This study examined the health information awareness on hand washing in primary schools, available facilities, challenges and implications of the findings. This was a survey research of primary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria. 5 primary schools were sampled. 815 school children were engaged. Instruments used were physical visitations to the schools, observation techniques, interactive section, model of hand washing and interview. The results showed that the school children had knowledge of hand washing through the class subjects and home training. However, only 2 schools have tap running water. The observation of available facilities showed buckets of water at strategic places in some schools and soap dishes. There were challenges of access to water and buckets in all the classroom. It was recommended that policy statement and good hygiene should be priortized in primary schools for good practices.

Keywords - awareness of hand washing, diseases, hygiene, school children, health information, SDG

Introduction

The concern on clean hands and hygiene is a global campaign to promote health and wellness. This has resulted in the development of health information engagement, educational and promotional tools for basic hygiene for different sectors. It elucidates the fact that health information awareness on clean hands plays important roles in preventing infectious disease transmission (Reeves, Priest& Poore, 2012). The pains of epidemics and pandemics in the world have necessitate that everyone, even primary school children should be engaged in health information to protect themselves and participate

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in creating the world we want on good health and wellness. It is not an understatement to remark that the schools and the children are among the first targets for communicating infections because of their vulnerability and easy susceptibility to diseases. Information has shown that hand washing promotion in child day- care facilities and schools has the tendency of preventing around 30% of diarrhea episodes which accounts for 1.8 million deaths in children in low- and middle- income countries (LMICs) (Ejemot- Nwadiaro, Ehiri, Arikpo & Critchle, 2015).

The fact that contaminated hands can potentially transfer virus to more than 5 surfaces or 14 objects (The Hygiene Library, 2019) is enough to offer health information to set out approaches to prevent diseases through hand washing with soap and water. Indeed, the facilitating of information awareness in schools is a critical strategy which is in line with the United Nations emphasis on leaving no one behind on sustainable development goals. With provision of simple facilities of soap and water, children can be protected, safe schools can be achieved, households can become healthier and happy, communities can thrive, the nation can develop and the earth can become a better planet for everyone. The United Nations 2030 Agenda strongly enjoined all to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages (SDG3) (WHO, 2019) with safe water and sanitation (SDG 6) (UN Water, 2019). Hence, libraries and information centers take action to engage and include even the schools in this important campaign.

In Nigeria, hand washing and hygiene are encouraged culturally and corporately with practices of washing before and after eating, after using the toilet and for general cleanliness**.** Indeed, it is endorsed by large number of governments, international institutions, civil society organizations, libraries and information centers, non- governmental organizations, (NGOs), private companies and individuals. It becomes imperative that access to health information is created in schools to catch them young on healthy living for the assurance of progressive society. However, reports from News Agency of Nigeria (2019) on the findings from the 2018 WASH National Outcome Routine Mapping (WASH-NORM) conducted by the Ministry of Water Resources and National Bureau of Statistics with support from UNICEF, revealed that only 21 per cent of households have access to basic hand hygiene services,12.5 per cent of households demonstrated proper hand washing with soap under running water, only six per cent of all households in Nigeria are likely to practice proper hand washing with water and soap at critical times. It simply emphasizes the importance of repositioning health information on hand washing and hygiene for health sustainability. This study therefore, examined the information awareness on hand washing in primary schools for the safety of the children and the entire nation.

Health is one of the basic necessities of life and key to achievement of anything in life. This is because only a healthy person can achieve a purpose. The delivery of health information is to ensure wellness, good life and sustainability (Nwafor-Orizu & Nwachukwu, 2014). The wellness is assured when simple hygiene and hand wash are maintained to the latter. Studies have shown that libraries and librarians have engaged in health information. Medical libraries provided and facilitated access to reliable, quality and current health information (Anyaoku, 2014 & Gathoni, 2012). Apart from physical information awareness activities, libraries maintain health information websites and other online programs to serve health professionals and general public (Pullen, Jones & Timon, 2011). Therefore delivering health information on hand washing is a good promotion of healthy living and style.

Good practices of hand washing have been known to remove dirt and microorganisms, prevent diseases and infections as well as

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promote good health. Hand hygiene is a general term referring to any action of hand cleansing by using water and detergent and/or the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers for the removal of transient microorganisms from hands (Pittet, Allegranzi & Boyce, 2009 and Watson, Ensink& Ramos, 2017). Diseases can easily be transmitted from the hands and school children are more susceptible to this. The simple practices of washing with soap helps to protect children from the two common global pediatric killers - diarrhea and lower respiratory infection (Bulled et al, 2017; Ejemot- Nwadiaro, Ehiri, Arikpo and Critchle, 2015). Improper hand washing has also been identified as one of the responsible factors that cause about 40% of infections resulting in prolonged illnesses (Khanal&Thapa, 2017; Sax, Allegranzi, Uckay, Lrson, Boyce & Pittet, 2017 and Sydnor & Perl, 2011).

Importantly, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child include the right to health, access to information and participation rights which encompass children's freedom to express opinions, to have a say in matters affecting their own lives (Children's Rights Alliance, 2010). The UNICEF (2020) aptly stated that the healthy development of children is crucial to the future well-being of any society. This says it all. In view of this, the News Agency of Nigeria (2019) reported that interschool quiz competition was organized for primary school pupils in the 62 local government areas with 3,268 participants to mark the 2019 Global Hand washing Day. Bulled, Poppe, Ramatsisti, Sitsula, Winegar, Gumbo, Dillingham & Smith (2017) reported as a quasi-experiment on hand washing among school children in Limpopo, South Africa with increase in hand washing occurring following improvements in hygiene and sanitation facilities. The notion is to imbibe good hand-washing practices in children, it will protect them from diseases, it will become sustainable habit and would establish future health nation. Clearly, perception strongly influences one's hand washing beliefs and practices (Suresh, 2015). Thus, information on hand washing and hygiene should commence from early life age, right from the homes before the children are sent to school. This is because real practices of clean hands play important role in preventing infectious disease transmission.

The provision of facilities for hand washing has been acclaimed. Khanal and Thapa (2017) reported that soap was the most popular agent.A UNICEF representative, Mr Oumar Doumbouya, stated during the 2019 Global Hand washing Day Celebration with the theme: "Clean Hands for All' that more than 100, 000 children under five die each year due to diarrhea, of which 90 per cent were directly attributed to unsafe water and sanitation (News Agency of Nigeria 2019). Now, this can easily be prevented if adequate information and facilities are provided for proper hygiene in schools. Nigeria can really maintain healthy nation right from the school children when spaces are created for information on hygiene. The statement also informed that the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sector in Nigeria was facing an interesting time with the recent declaration of state of emergency in the sector, the target to end open defecation by 2025 and government commitment's to revitalize the sector. The Hygiene Library (2019) surmised that hand washing should never be neglected and should be cultivated in lifestyle.

Studies have reported that the reason many people do not wash their hands properly and regularly is because of lack of awareness and consciousness of its benefits. Perhaps this is the reason Bulled et al (2017) stated that the promotion of hand washing for disease prevention remains a challenge particularly in resource-limited settings. According to Sandhu and Goodnight (2014) hand washing interventions in resource- poor communities are often hindered by promotion of official hand washing guidelines that assume soap, clean water, and towels are readily available. It is more prevalent in developing countries. Lack of

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inclusion, hand washing facilities and ineffective hand washing practices can actually cause risks of contracting infections (New agency of Nigeria, 2019). Health challenges in many countries have resulted in painful death which would have been abated if relevant information on simple hand washing and hygiene have been disseminated The awareness and information of health aspects of hand washing behaviour is important as it enhances the degree of sustainability of an intervention in hand washing.

Statement of the problem

Access to health information and awareness on hand washing are meant to solidify health sustainability and prevent the spread of infections for sustainable development. However, the issue on clean hands at all times had continued to raise concerns not only in Nigeria but globally. With current global pandemic of covid-19 and threats to life of the people of all ages, the issues of information awareness with facilities like water, soap and hand sanitizer in schools becomes imperative. The simple hygiene observances need to be harnessed for the interest of preventing further spread of diseases. Besides, cases of outbreak of diarrhea, cholera, pandemic and epidemics have put great strain on the citizens which need to be checked through information engagement. The fact remains that health information and awareness will promote regular hand washing practices for healthy existence. Therefore, school children need regular health awareness for guidelines and care on hygiene to be safe. The primary school which is entrusted with the early education of children is expected to create spaces for adequate information, awareness and facilities for the promotion of good hand-washing practices. Hence this study investigated the information awareness on hand washing practices and hygiene in primary schools.

Research Questions

This following research questions were used for the study:

1. What is the level of health information awareness on hand washing practices in primary schools in Anambra State?
2. What are the available facilities for hand washing in the pilot primary schools?
3. What factors militate against hand-washing?
4. What are the implications of the findings?

Research Method

This was a survey research of primary schools in Anambra State, South East Nigerian on hygiene hand washing. Five primary schools were sampled, drawn from the host communities where the researchers work and live in. The schools were New Bethel Primary School Onitsha, St Marks Primary School Onitsha, Farm Settlement Nursery and Primary School Igbariam, St Peter Primary School Umudioka and Sir Ben Erinne Nursey and Primary School, Okija. Two schools were from the city while three were from rural communities. A total of 815 school children were engaged using mixed methods of data collection which included physical visitations to the schools, observation techniques, interactive section, model of hand washing and interview. The interaction with the teachers and the children took place at the assembly ground where stimulations were made on proper hand washing with soap and running water. The children were made to do the exercises while others watched and corrections were made by the researchers. Donations of buckets, soap and hand towels were given to all the schools for sustainable hand washing and hygiene. The activity was carried out on October 10, 2018 in commemoration of Global Hand washing day in the different locations, respectively. Data were collected and presented in tables.

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Presentation of Findings

Table 1: Primary schools visited and their locations

S/N	Primary schools	Location	Status of the schools	Class segmentation
1.	New Bethel Primary School	Onitsha	Urban area	Nursery and primary sections
2.	St Marks Primary School,	Onitsha	Urban area	Nursery and primary sections
3.	Farm Settlement Nursery and Primary School	Igbariam	Rural community	Nursery and primary sections
4.	St Peter Primary School Umudioka	Awkuzu	Rural community	Nursery and primary sections
5.	Sir Ben Erinne Nursery/Primary School	Okija	Rural community	Nursery and primary sections

The Table shows the five primary schools visited. Two schools were in Onitsha, the urban area where the other three, Igbaraim, Awkuzu and Okija were from the rural communities. All the school have nursery and primary sections. Thus, there are many children in the primary schools that are exposed to hygiene and hand washing information.

Table 2: Awareness of hygiene and hand washing

S/N	Items	Yes	No	Sometimes
1.	**Do you know about hand washing and hygiene?**	**X**		
	How did you know?			
	It is in our class subject and text books	**X**		
	Our parents and teachers taught us	**X**		
2.	**I wash my hands when?**			
	Before eating	**X**		
	After eating	**X**		
	After using the toilet	**X**		
	After playing	**X**		
	After handling the waste basket	**X**		
3.	**How many hands do you at a time?**			
	Two hands	**X**		

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5.	**What do you use in hand washing?**			
	Water	**X**		
	Soap		**X**	
	Sanitizer			**X**
6.	**Why is it important to wash hands regularly?**			
	To prevent diseases and infections	**X**		
	To feel clean	**X**		
	To be healthy	**X**		

The table above shows the interactive session with the children and teachers in the assembly ground. The children answered correctly that they know what hand washing was and when to wash because their parents and teachers taught them. It was also part of their classroom subjects. They also see it done on the pages of their textbooks and charts.

During interview, it was revealed that there was no fast rule on hand washing that sometimes it was overlooked. Although, they admitted it was wrong not to wash hand regularly as dirty hand can make one sick. However, the two community schools in Igbariam and Awkuzu did not practice hand washing nor have facilities for that in their schools but know about it from their class subjects and pictures.

On the model of hand washing, the researchers had simulation with the children. They went prepared with buckets with tap, soap, towels and jerry cans of water. The schools also provided water while proper hand washing was publicly displayed according to United Nation's recommendation of washing from the elbow, rubbing the palms together, washing in-between the fingers and tips of the nails. The hand washing was done over running water. The children and their teachers were called up to practice what they saw and they did that very well, marveling at the new learning that took place.

Table 3: Observation of available facilities for hand washing

S/N	Items	New Bethel Onitsha	St Marks Onitsha	Farm Settlement Igbariam	St Peter Umudioka Awkuzu	Sir Ben Erinne Okija
1.	Tap with running water		X	X		
2.	Bucket with tap and water		X			X
3.	Bowl					X
4.	Soap		X			X
5.	Liquid soap					
6.	Hand towel					
7.	Disposable hand towel					
8.	Hand sanitizers					
9.	Hand dryer					
10.	Central hand					X

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washing stand

The Table shows that there was tap with running water in St Marks Primary School, Omagba and Farm Settlement Igbariam. There were also buckets in all the schools in Onitsha and Okija. St. Marks primary School, Omagba has liquid soap and soap. Sir Ben Erinne, Okija has bucket with tap and water, soap and one central hand washing stand. No school has hand towel, disposable towel, hand sanitizer and dryer. No facility of hand washing listed above was seen in St Peter Primary School, Umudioka Awkuzu.

On the availability and accessibility of tap running water, the interview disclosed that St Marks Primary School, Omagba was situated in a church compound and enjoyed free water supply while Farm Settlement Igbariam was situated inside the Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam and enjoyed the university water supply. From the other schools, the children disclosed that sometimes, when there is no water, they fetch from the next compound.

Factors militating against hand washing:

From the interview, the findings were:

- There is no strict rule on hand washing or policy. So children wash their hands sometimes
- No supply of soap, towel, dryer and hand sanitizer
- Irregular water supply. Sometimes the children fetch water outside the school compound
- There was no provision of bucket with tap for washing over running water
- The model of hand washing shown by the researchers was new to them in all the schools
- No update or new information on proper hand washing

Discussion of findings

Primary schools in urban and rural communities (Table 1) are acknowledged and served with information for everyone is important in sustainable development. It presupposes that school children in any location need awareness and exposure to clean hands to remain healthy too. This rhymes with the report that hand washing promotion in child day care facilities and schools can prevent around 30% of diarrhea episodes which accounts for 1.8 million deaths in children in low- and middle- income countries (LMICs) (Ejemot Nwadiaro, Ehiri, Arikpo & Critchle, 2015). Thus, the right step has been taken in the schools.

The interactive session with the school children on awareness of hand washing practices proved that they understood the benefits of hand washing and danger of not practicing hygiene (Table 2). Thus, the information engagement serves as reminders as well as fulfilling the child's right to health and information (Children's Rights Alliance, 2010) as important members of the society. With the model of hand washing displayed and practiced by the children, it signifies the desire to do the proper things for the children, thereby, summarizing The Hygiene Library (2019) emphasis that hand washing should never be neglected but cultivated as lifestyle.

Clearly, the disclosure on observation techniques shows the porous nature of facilities that are visible in primary schools for hand washing. Only one school has six items out of the twelve listed. The missing hand washing facilities are indication that more information engagement is needed with follow up. The truth is that when schools do not provide soap, running water and washing stands, the children are not safe and the growing population is in danger of not reaching to maturity.

This brings to fore the factors that militate against hand washing and hygiene. That there was no strict rule on hand washing in the schools is disturbing and indicates lack of

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knowledge and disregard to children's health issues. The implication is that infections may always recycle while achieving good health and wellness with sanitation (SDGs 3 & 6) will be difficult. Health is a basic need that should not be played with, especially where children are concerned. Therefore, facilitation of access to information will prevent infection, increase awareness and compliance to good hand washing.

The study has shown that hand washing and good hygiene are critical measures in preventing epidemic and pandemic. Although the benefits are acknowledged, the provision of adequate facilities seems to be hard to achieve. The implication is that when spaces for information on hand washing is not created, the school management may not realize the danger the school children are facing. When children are sick, the school becomes sick because. the teachers may even be infected and spread the infections to their homes. This will cause reverberating effect where the homes, schools and the society become stressed with worry. Besides, a sick child keeps the mother at home which reduces the work force and sometimes affects the income and the economy. Therefore, genuine concern should be paid to hand washing in the schools.

Conclusion

In spite of the local and international campaigns on adherence and compliance to the hand washing practices, there are still shortcomings in achieving this goal. School children in the rural and urban communities need exposure on clean hands and hygiene. They are the progressive population that will drive sustainable development. They should be well informed. Thus, the study concludes that:

- Practices of good hand washing should be taken seriously in all the schools
- Information is a critical factor and should be inclusive in the awareness on hand washing to curb diseases and infections
- Provision and accessibility of hand washing facilities are very important aspects to be installed
- All militating factors against provision and practices of hand washing and hygiene should be scrapped in the schools

Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn:

- Let there be policy on hand washing and hygiene practices in schools which should be supervised regularly for compliance
- The school management should create special spaces that are accessible where all facilities of hand washing are provided and monitored for replacement and observances
- Updates on new hand washing practices and hygiene should be communicated to schools
- Government should provide tap and regular water supply in schools to improve sanitation

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