

KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE AND PRACTICES RELATED TO EARLY CHILDHOOD CARIES (ECC) OF COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS (CHWS) IN THE MATERNAL & POSTNATAL HEALTH (MPH) SERVICES IN PRIMARY HEALTHCARE CENTERS AT NKANU WEST LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS, ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA



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INTRODUCTION :

Early Childhood Caries (ECC) remains one of the most common childhood diseases and is considered a major public health problem in a developing country such as Nigeria due to the multifactorial aetiology of the disease and the limited resources to combat the situation [1]. The recognition as a serious public health problem is due to ECC's high prevalence, impact on quality of life, potential for increasing risk of caries in the permanent dentition and role in oral health inequalities [2]. CHWs serve to impart positive health knowledge and behavior in society [3]. Due to poor access to quality healthcare, pregnant women, nursing mothers and young children in rural areas are more likely to see the CHW than a physician or dental practitioner. In most cases their need is for well-baby/check-up examinations to monitor developmental progress in infants and antenatal and immunisation services. Hence, the knowledge, attitude, and practices (KAP) of MPH Community Health Workers towards oral health, and by extension early childhood caries, influences the community as they are the first contact point in the community for health care services in general, and oral health education in particular [3][4]. This study aimed to assess the knowledge, attitude, and practices of the CHWs who provide maternal and postnatal health services at selected Primary Healthcare Centers in Nkanu West Local Government Areas, Enugu State, to help with formulation of future oral health education programs for the CHWs that will ultimately contribute to the prevention of ECC in this rural region.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Assessment of the knowledge, attitude and practices regarding Early Childhood Caries among Community Health Workers (CHWs) of Maternal and Postnatal Health (MPH) services in Primary Healthcare Centers at Nkanu West Local Government Areas, Enugu State, Nigeria.
2. Provision of valuable stimuli and perspectives toward the formulation of relevant oral health education programs for the Community Health Workers in Nigeria and integration of oral health into primary healthcare systems.

METHODOLOGY:

A descriptive qualitative cross-sectional survey was designed in the form of a hard copy questionnaire to assess the knowledge, attitude, and practices of community health care workers on ECC. The study was conducted among 86 community healthcare workers of Maternal and Postnatal Health, aged between 20 and 60 years working in selected public and private Primary Healthcare Centres of Nkanu West L.G.A, Enugu State, Nigeria. Informed consent was obtained from the health care workers before the start of the study.

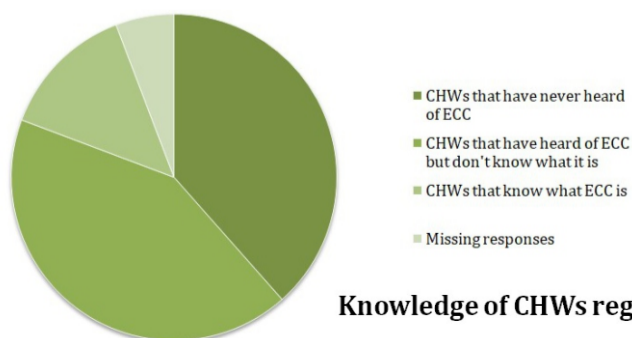
Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that no identifiable data was to be collected. In cases where language interpretation and explanations were needed, especially for the lowest cadre of CHWs (traditional birth attendants and village health workers), interpreters were able to translate into their local languages. The questionnaire, consisting of 65 questions, was divided into five parts (A - E) : (A) Demographic characteristics, (B) Knowledge of ECC and risk factors, (C) Preventive attitudes towards ECC and Oral Health problems. (D) Practices regarding Child Health in their practice setting (E) Sources of information. The questionnaire required 5 to 7 minutes to complete.

RESULTS:

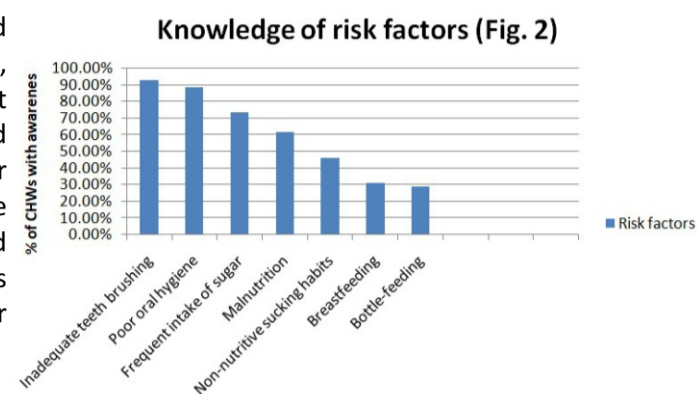
52 Community Health Workers responded, yielding a response rate of 60.5%. Most participants have either never heard about Early Childhood Caries (38.5%) or have heard of it but don't know what it is (42.3%), while few participants (13.5%) know what ECC is (Figure 1). Knowledge of CHWs regarding ECC (fig 1).

Knowledge of CHWs regarding ECC

CHWs that have never heard of ECC	38.5%
CHWs that have heard of ECC but don't know what it is	42.3%
CHWs that know what ECC is	13.5%
Missing responses	5.8%



Most participants identified inadequate teeth brushing, poor oral hygiene, frequent intake of sugar and malnutrition as risk factors for caries, however, bottle feeding, breast feeding and non-nutritive sucking habits were identified to a lesser degree as risk factors.



Most (80.8%) of the participants had positive views about routine dental visits, but only 44.2% advised a first dental visit between the ages 6 months to 1 year. Although a good number of participants (73.0%) had positive views on fluoride supplementation in caries prevention, knowledge of appropriate fluoride concentration in (ppm) was not in keeping with current guidelines. Also 21.2% of CHWs responded that the teeth be brushed once per day for 4mins.

The feedback about practices identified that most (75.0%) of the participants perform oral health examination on their patients. 44.2% of CHWs advise nursing mothers that children be discouraged from using a feeding bottle at the age of 1year, while 23.1% and 17.3% of CHWs discourage bottle feeding at the age of 1.5 years and 2 years respectively. Also, 34.6% advise that children be weaned off breastfeeding at the age of 2years, while 25.0% and 38.6% of CHWs advise nursing mothers to wean off breastfeeding at the ages of 1.5years and 1year respectively. 25.0% of the CHWs advise parents against the use of fluoride toothpaste for their children.

36.5% of CHWs receive information concerning the prevention of oral diseases from colleagues, while 23% receive information from dentists. 78.8% of the CHWs indicated that they received little amount of education about oral health during the course of their training, and 80.8% of CHWs felt they required additional training in this area.

DISCUSSION:

Previous studies elaborated on the prevalence of ECC among preschool children aged 6–71 months in suburban Nigeria, as well as its association with infant feeding and oral health-related behavior in Lagos, Nigeria[5], [6].

However, no previous study could be found depicting or interrelating the knowledge, attitude and practices of CHWs in maternal and postnatal healthcare services, regarding the problems commonly associated with Early Childhood Caries.

This study has identified that the Community Health Workers (CHWs) of Maternal and Postnatal Health (MPH) services in Primary Healthcare Centers at Nkanu West Local Government Areas, Enugu State, Nigeria, demonstrated positive attitudes toward oral health. However, their knowledge and practices with respect to ECC, oral diseases prevention, including the use of fluoride and timing of the first dental visit, appear to be lacking.

CONCLUSION:

There is need for formulation of a relevant oral health education programme for the Community Health Workers in Nigeria, especially pertaining to children.

The results presented here highlight the need for this study to be continued and implemented on a larger scale in order to further understand the level of ECC awareness and education amongst Nigerian CHWs. The results may also be useful in providing insights for governmental policy development and implementation regarding access to basic oral health care and education, which could help in the prevention of Early Childhood Caries in socially disadvantaged areas.

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