

Perception and Practice of Periodic Medical Checkup by Traders in South East Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: *Periodic medical checkup helps improve life expectancy. Traders are a major economically active population in south eastern Nigeria and are expected to benefit from periodic medical checkup. A good knowledge and understanding of the prevailing health knowledge, attitude and preventive health behaviour of these traders is essential for creating population-specific health programs.*

Objectives: *To determine the knowledge, attitude and practice of periodic medical checkup by traders in Southeast Nigeria, as well as the influence of age, gender and educational status on its practice in this group.*

Method: *A questionnaire- based descriptive study carried out among traders in Nnewi, South east Nigeria, who were selected randomly between September and October 2010.*

Results: *A total of 323 traders responded, 252 males (78.0%) and 71 (22.0%) females. The mean age was 31.9± 10 years and the ages ranged from 15 to 65 years with majority (49.2%) between 20-29 years. Majority (61.0%) had secondary school education and 1.2% had post secondary school education. About 74.9% were aware of periodic medical checkup; all females and 67.9% of males. Major source of information was through friends (61.2%), then mass media (18.2%). The commonest known type of medical checkup was general examination (60.7%), then blood pressure measurement (55.4%). About 63.8% feel everybody needs medical checkup. Most (85.5%) feel medical checkups can improve their work efficiency. Only 29.4% of males and 39.4% of females practice periodic medical checkup. Age, gender and educational status were found not to affect practice of periodic medical checkup significantly.*

Conclusion: *This study revealed a high level of awareness of periodic medical checkup, but a very low level of practice among this group. Effort should be made by health agencies to educate traders on the various types of medical check up, their indications and benefits as well as its practice encouraged*

Key words: *Periodic medical checkup, traders, Nigeria*

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INTRODUCTION

Life expectancy and prosperity have risen in developed and developing countries over the past 50 years and are expected to continue to rise¹. By 2020, the life expectancy in the developing world is expected to pass the 70 years barrier, causing the world's life expectancy to continue to climb. Health was defined by the World Health Organization as the state of physical, mental and social well being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity².

A health check up is defined as a thorough study or examination of the health of an individual². Health check up should start even while the baby is in the womb to find out congenital diseases and at the time of birth to identify and correct many diseases. Health should be monitored during childhood and adolescence. Regular checkups are necessary to detect problems like heart diseases, cancers, diabetes and others³⁻¹⁰.

Most adults need a thorough medical examination of which the frequency increases if there is a health problem that requires continuing care. The interval between checkups depends on age. Traders usually fall between the ages of 18 and 60 years and are expected to benefit maximally from periodic medical checkups because they are regularly under stress. Regular checkups save lives even when there is no specific problem, since the absence of disagreeable symptoms does not necessarily guarantee that one is in good health. The main goals of a periodic medical examination are to diagnose treatable asymptomatic diseases¹⁰⁻¹⁹. Some studies have also shown decreased rates of invasive cancers and decreased mortality in people who undergo regular medical checkup¹¹⁻¹⁴.

A periodic health check up is important for traders because it leads to promotion of health and reduction in morbidity and mortality and the consequent reduction in man hours and economic drain caused by diseases. The health of this group should be maintained to help in sustenance of the national economy. It is suspected that extremely long working hours increase the risk of sudden death from too much occupational stress⁷. A case-control study carried out in Japan shows a U shaped relationship between mean monthly working hours and the risk of acute myocardial infarction⁷, hence a need for improved level of medical checkup among the working population. Also, providing preventive health services would decrease the demand by the elderly and result in a more effective use of health resources^{9,10}.

South eastern Nigeria has many commercial towns, the populations comprising mainly of traders. Nnewi is one of the major commercial towns in south eastern Nigeria and as such has created job opportunities for a large number of people and provides a major source of revenue for the government. The traders constitute the major economically active population in this area. This makes their preventive health behavior a very important issue of public health concern. Little work has been done to ascertain the preventive health behavior of traders in Nigeria. The findings from this study will therefore help in creating population-specific health programs and interventions aimed at improving the preventive health behavior and quality of life of traders in Nigeria.

STUDY DESIGN

This is a questionnaire-based descriptive study done among traders in Nnewi North Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria between September and October 2010. Nnewi is a commercial town in Anambra State. It is about twenty kilometers away from Onitsha, and about forty kilometers away from Awka, the state capital. The inhabitants are mainly corporate business men and traders, with few public servants and professionals. Businessmen and traders from all over Nigeria, some west and central African countries undergo business transactions with traders at Nnewi.

Traders in Nnewi North Local Government Area were selected randomly; one out of every five stores was chosen in the market places and roadside stores, and the trader included in the study. Consent to answer the questionnaire was sought from the individuals, after due explanations to them, as well as assuring them of the confidentiality in answering the questionnaires. The questionnaires were handed over to the individuals who gave their consent and collected back once the individuals had completed their questionnaires each. The questionnaires were read and interpreted to individuals who could not read and write.

The data obtained from the study were analyzed using Epi info software version 2000. Tests of association were done using the chi square test at 95% confidence interval.

RESULTS

A total of 323 traders responded and were included in the study. There were 252 (78.0%) males and 71 (22.0%) females. The mean age was 31.9 ± 10.0 years. The predominant age group was 20-29 years for males (52.8%) while that of the females was 30-39 years (47.9%). One hundred and ninety seven (61.0%) of the respondents had secondary school education while

only 1.2% had post secondary school education. Sixteen (5.0%) had no formal education at all. One hundred and forty-two (44.0%) were married. The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents are shown on table I.

Two hundred and forty-two (74.9%) of the respondents were aware of periodic medical check up; all the females and 67.9% of the males. Majority (61.2%) of all respondents received information about periodic medical check up from friends and 18.2% from mass media. Various sources of information about medical check up are shown on table II. The commonest known type of medical check up is general examination (60.7%), then blood pressure check (55.4%). Six (2.5%) knew no type of medical check up.

One hundred and fifty four (63.6%) of respondents felt everybody needs medical check up while 36.4% felt it is for the sick only. Majority (59.9%) of respondents felt one should go for medical check up monthly, then every 6 months (19.4%). Thirty (12.4%) of the respondents did not know about the frequency of medical check ups. One hundred and twenty-three males (71.9%) and forty-two females (59.2%) felt both genders require medical check ups equally. However, 35.2% of the females and 11.7% of males felt females needed medical check up more than males. Two hundred and seven (85.5%) of those who knew about periodic medical check up felt it could improve their work efficiency; 87.7% of the males and 80.3% of the females.

Only 29.4% of males and 39.4% of females practice periodic medical check up. The predominant age bracket that practiced periodic medical check up was 40-49 years (42.9%), followed by 30-39 years (34.1%). No respondent under 20 years of age practices periodic medical check up. Traders with secondary school education had the highest level of practice of periodic medical check up (32.5%), followed by those with primary school education (32.1%). One (25%) of those with post secondary school education practiced such. Seventy (68.6%) of respondents who practiced periodic medical check up did so monthly while 28.4% attended every 6 months and 3.0%, yearly. Sixty-one (59.8%) of those who practiced periodic medical check up had done that within the last month while 39.2% had done so between 1-6 months earlier. The commonest medical check up attended was general examination (61.8%); 66.2% of males and 50% of females, while 32.3% of the respondents, predominantly females (46.4%) had gone for check up to measure their blood pressure. Six (5.9%) respondents, 5 being males, had gone for eye check up.

TABLES**Table I: Sociodemographic characteristics**

Age	Males		Females		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<20 Years	15	4.6%	0	0%	15	4.6%
20-29 Years	133	41.2%	26	8.0%	159	49.2%
30-39 Years	48	14.9%	34	10.6%	82	25.4%
40-49 Years	41	12.6%	8	2.5%	49	15.2%
50-59 Years	12	3.7%	3	1.0%	15	4.6%
60-69 Years	3	1.0%	0	0%	3	1.0%
TOTAL	252	78.0%	71	22.0%	323	100%

Educational Level	Males		Females		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
None	10	3.1%	6	1.8%	16	5.0%
Primary	91	28.2%	15	4.6%	106	32.8%
Secondary	148	45.8%	49	15.2%	197	61.0%
Tertiary	3	0.9%	1	0.3%	4	1.2%
TOTAL	252	78.0%	71	22.0%	323	100%

Table II: Awareness and Perception of Periodic Medical Check up

Sources of knowledge	Males(n=171)		Females(n=71)		Total(n=242)	
	No.	%	No.	No.	%	No.
Friends	111	64.9%	37	52.1%	148	61.2%
Family	11	6.4%	28	39.4%	39	16.1%
Mass media	40	23.4%	4	5.7%	44	18.2%
School	9	5.3%	2	2.8%	11	4.5%

Types of check up known	Males(n=171)		Females(n=71)		Total(n=242)	
	No.	%	No.	No.	%	No.
Dental	40	23.4%	26	36.6%	66	27.3%
Eye	41	24.0%	28	39.4%	69	28.5%
Blood Pressure	91	53.2%	43	60.6%	134	55.4%
General Exam	90	52.6%	57	80.3%	147	60.7%
None	6	3.5%	0	0%	6	2.5%

Perception of interval for check up	Males(n=171)		Females(n=71)		Total(n=242)	
	No.	%	No.	No.	%	No.
Monthly	103	60.2%	42	59.2%	145	59.9%
Every 6 Months	34	19.9%	13	18.3%	47	19.4%
Yearly	10	5.8%	5	7.0%	15	6.2%
Every 2 Years	3	1.8%	2	2.8%	5	2.1%
I Don` t Know	21	12.3%	9	12.7%	30	12.4%

Perception on which gender that needs check up	Males(n=171)		Females(n=71)		Total(n=242)	
	No.	%	No.	No.	%	No.
Males	12	7.0%	0	0%	12	5.0%
Females	20	11.7%	25	35.2%	45	18.6%
Both Equally	123	71.9%	42	59.2%	165	68.2%
I Don` t Know	16	9.4%	4	5.6%	20	8.2%

Table III: Practice of Periodic Medical Check up

Age Group	Practicing		Not Practicing	
	No	%	No	%
<20 Years	0	0%	15	100%
20-29 Years	49	30.8%	110	69.2%
30-39 Years	28	34.1%	54	65.9%
40-49 Years	21	49.2%	28	57.1%
50 Years and above	4	20.0%	14	80.0%
Total	102	33.3%	221	66.7%

Educational Level	Practicing		Not Practicing	
	No.	%	No.	%
None (n=16)	3	18.8%	13	81.2%
Primary (n=106)	34	32.1%	72	67.9%
Secondary (n=197)	64	32.5%	133	67.5%
Tertiary (n=4)	1	25.0%	3	75.0%
Total (n=323)	102	31.6%	221	68.4%

DISCUSSION

Most (74.9%) of the respondents were aware of periodic medical check up. This may be as a result of their formal education. All females knew about periodic medical check up while only 67.9% of males did so. This might be due to nonchalant attitude of many males towards health care as well as the fact that the females might have been educated on that during antenatal visits when pregnant. This finding is also in keeping with findings in other parts of the world^{18,19}.

The major source of information about periodic medical check up was through friends. This is not unexpected considering the nature of their work as most of their time is spent in the market place with fellow traders and customers.

The predominantly known type of check up by both males and females were general examination and blood pressure measurement. This reflects a relatively good knowledge of hypertensive disorders as it might be a common illness amongst the traders, considering the strenuous nature of their work. This is in keeping with findings from work done in Japan⁸. A poor knowledge of dental and eye check up may be as a result of limited education, as only 1.2% of them attained post-secondary school education. The few (2.5%) of the traders who knew no type of check up are not surprisingly, those with no formal education at all.

About 63.3% of respondents felt that medical check ups are needed by everybody. However, a reasonable proportion (36.4%) felt it is for the sick only. This is restricted to those with lower level of education who

not surprisingly might have very little knowledge of the indications and implications of periodic medical check up.

Majority (59.9%) of the respondents felt that one should go for check up monthly. This is quite encouraging. However, a few (12.4%) did not know how often one should go for check ups. Those are ones of the lower educational levels and is not surprising.

Most of the respondents (85.5%) felt that periodic medical check up can improve their work efficiency. This is expected, considering their level of awareness of periodic medical check up as well as the fact that most of them had the basic education that would enable them appreciate the benefits of periodic medical check up.

Only very few respondents practiced periodic medical check up. About 29.4% of males and 39.4% of females practiced periodic medical check up, but this difference is not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). This level of practice is very poor compared with the level of awareness of periodic medical check up in this group and may however, be attributed to work stress and very busy engagement associated with their trading. This is also in keeping with findings in other parts of the world^{15,19}.

The predominant age group that practiced periodic medical check up is 40-49 years (42.9%), then 30-39 years (34.1%). None of the traders under 20 years of age had gone for a medical check up before. However, these age-related differences in level of practice are found not to be statistically significant [$p > 0.05$]. It

however agrees with the findings in the work done by Serrano MM et al^{16, 18}. The influence of age on the practice might be as a result of the fact that there are increased levels of medical illnesses with increasing age as well as an increase in level of income at those higher ages that would enable such. Lack of periodic medical check up in those below 20 years of age might be attributed to low levels of medical illnesses at those ages.

About 32.3% of respondents with up to secondary school education practiced periodic medical check up, while 30.3% of those with primary school educational level or no formal education at all did so. However, this difference is found to be of no statistical significance [$p > 0.05$].

The commonest medical check up attended was general examination (61.8%), followed by blood pressure measurement (32.3%). This agrees with their knowledge predominantly of these types of medical check up. It also suggests a high level of awareness of hypertensive disorders in this group.

CONCLUSION

This study shows a high level of awareness of periodic medical check up in this group, though the actual level of practice is very low. Also, a poor knowledge of the various types of medical check up was noted, except for general examination and blood pressure measurement which were well known to them. Age, gender and educational status were not found to affect the practice of periodic medical check up significantly.

Effort should be made by the government and other health agencies to educate traders on the various types of medical check up, their indications and benefits as well as its practice encouraged. Health information dissemination as regards medical check up, through media houses should be improved by the appropriate authorities to enhance the knowledge and practice of periodic medical check up.

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