## Feeding Habit and Problems of the Aged People in Isoko North and South Local Government Areas of Delta State, Nigeria

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### Abstract
*The study investigated the feeding habit and problems of the aged people in Isoko North and South Local Government Areas of Delta State, Nigeria. The sample comprised of 150 elderly men and women from various occupational groups. Questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. Findings showed that the most commonly eaten food by the elderly people are: bread/margarine, yam, fish, garri, semotiva, rice and beans. The fruits generally eaten are mango, pineapple, pawpaw, and oranges. The major problems of the elderly people are low income to meet their needs, need of attention all the time and reduced strength. It was recommended among other things that the food given to the elderly people should be balanced with good cooking methods to aid digestion*

### Introduction
Ageing is a natural inevitable phenomenon, which starts at conception. Old age is said to start after 60 years. Old age could be recognized by certain physical and physiological changes. Mohammed (1997) described old age as involving a number of biological changes, which include wrinkles, poor eyesight, deafness, growing of grey hair and bending of the body. Ogunwa (2002) added other symptoms of old age as trembling hands and failing memory.

Ezema (2000) found that old age has been recognized as a social problem and that in many cases growing old means growing into poverty, poor health and dependency. Most old people are found to have low income, little accumulated wealth and so in poor position to maintain their standard of good feeding. Ezema noted that poor health and sensory defect frequently limit social mobility resulting in a further lowering of the standard of living. In addition, old age is an integral part of a whole which should bring fulfilment and self actualization.

Anyakoha and Eluwa (1991) stated that old people are characterized by reduced physical activity. This implies that the amount of energy food intake should also be low. Ezema (2008) remarked that the need for protein, vitamin and minerals remain unchanged and that there might even be need for an increase as tissue breakdown increase in old age.

In some homes, the aged women are regularly involved in food preparation, washing clothes, cleaning, sweeping, child care and at times in firewood and water collection. Ezema (2006) reported that aged women in Anambra State enjoy good health which is traceable to good feeding habit.

Mohammed (1997) stated that old people have emotional stress. They want to sleep most of the time, and some expect frequent attention. Some forget easily, careless about themselves and become disoriented. Many feel that they are a burden and express the desire to die. Valentine (1999) stated that social pressure is a potent factor that releases faddism behaviour. The advice of "old-timers" may be fallacies e.g. a nursing mother should not eat food containing oil or drink cold water.

Cameroon and Zardoni (1995) observed that food fallacies have caused a lot of barrier to individuals and family health especially of older people. This must have been responsible for certain food deficiencies in some people especially the aged ones.

**Purpose of the Study**

1. To identify the types of food eaten by the elderly people in Isoko North and South Local Government Areas of Delta State.

2. To identify the food c consumption pattern of the elderly people in the area of study.

3. To find out the problems experienced by the elderly in terms of nutrition in the area of study.

**Research Questions**

1. What are the foods commonly eaten by the elderly people in Isoko North and South Local Government Areas of Delta State?

2. What is the food consumption pattern of the elderly people in the area of study?

3. What are the problems experienced by the elderly people in terms of feeding?

**Methodology**

The population of the study was made up of all the elderly people in Isoko North and South Local Government Areas of Delta State who have retired from various occupational groups.

A sample of 150 elderly men and women were randomly selected from Isoko North and South Local Government Areas in Delta State. Seventy-five elderly persons were randomly selected from each local government area.

Questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. Section A was on age of respondent. Section B was on the feeding practices/habits. Section C was on feeding related problems the elderly people have.

Data was collected through a survey study in which questionnaire were administered. The copies of the questionnaire were given to the elderly people to respond to through the help of research assistants. Necessary explanations were made. The literate people filled their responses into the questionnaire. Those who had poor vision and the illiterates were interviewed in English or the local languages by the research assistants. The responses were then recorded on the questionnaire. The percentages of the responses were calculated.

**Findings**

Findings from the study showed that 13.3% of the elderly people were between 65-70 years. Twelve percent of them were between 71-75 years. The largest proportion (46.7%) were between 81-58 years.

Table 2 showed that 105 (70%) of the elderly people usually eat bread, 33 (22.0%) of them like bread. None of the elderly people avoided eating bread. Ninety-one (60.7%) of the people usually eat eggs. Fifty-two (34.7%) actually like eating eggs. Twenty (13.3%) of then avoided eating eggs.

**Eating Pattern of the Aged People**

One hundred and one (67.3%) of the elderly people usually eat thrice daily. Thirty-five (23%) eat four times every day. It was found that 10 (6.67%) of the elderly eat snacks every day. Thirty (20.0%) of them eat snacks sometimes. Ninety five (63.3%) of them eat snacks once a while. Biscuit are usually eaten by (54.7%) of the old people. Chinchin was eaten by 40 (26.7%) of the people. Egg roll was eaten by 55 (36.7%) of the people. Fish roll was eaten by 40 (26.6%) of them. Thirty five (22.0%) ate fish pie. Meat pie was eaten by 70 (46.7%) of them. Gala was eaten by 61 (40.7%). Forty-four (29.3%) ate puff puff. Buns were eaten by 41 (27.3%). It was found that Milo was usually drunk by 60 (40%) of the old people ice cream was consumed by 44 (29.3%) of them. Some 35 (22.0%) took Coca cola. Fanta was drunk by 42 (28.7%). Fifty five (36.7%) of them were in the habit of drinking milk drink. Bournvita was usually drunk by 56 (37.3%). Pap+Milk was usually consumed by 85 (55.3%) of the old people. Palm wine was usually drunk by 80 (53.3%) of the elderly people.

Table 3 showed that 40.7% of the elderly eat mango, and 48.0% eat oranges. Other fruits eaten are shown on the table.

Table 4 showed that 60.1% of elderly people have low income to meet their needs e.g. feeding. Loneliness was experienced by 6.62% of the people. Some (40.7%) of them complained of needing attention all the time. Other problems are shown on the table 4.

**Discussion of Findings**

The study investigated the feeding habit and problems of the elderly people in Isoko North and South Local Government Areas of Delta State. Findings showed that some of the elderly people eat fruits. The most commonly eaten fruits are pawpaw, mango, pineapple and banana. These fruits are soft, fresh and easy to chew. They are also refreshing. More so, these fruits are common in the area of study. Few of them ate water melon and apples. These fruits are not indigenous to the area. If these rich fruits are made available and are cheap, they could be very acceptable to the elderly people. Fruits supply vitamins, minerals and water. They help to improve the nutritional status of the elderly people. The most commonly eaten foods are bread, garri, plantain, rice+beans, yam and eggs.

Findings indicated that the old people usually experienced some problems. One of their problems is reduced physical activity. Anyakoha and Eluwa (1991) stated that old people are characterized by reduced physical activity.

This could be due to reduced physical energy. Reduced strength was also one of the problems of the elderly. However, some of them do not have such a problem. In some homes, the aged women are regularly involved in food preparation washing clothes, cleaning, sweeping, child care and at times in firewood and water collection. Needing attention all the time was one of the problems of the aged people. The elderly people do not want to be neglected. They want to have a sense of belonging. Difficulty in maintaining high standard of hygiene could stem from reduced strength. Some of the aged people sleep a lot. Mohammed (1997) stated that old people have emotional stress. They want to sleep most of the time and some expect frequent attention.

**Conclusion**
The study investigated the feeding habit and problems of the elderly in Isoko North and South Local Government Areas in Delta State, Nigeria. There is need for those taking care of the elderly people to include vegetables and fruits in the daily meals of the elderly. This will help the elderly to maintain good health. Varying the meals will make feeding interesting to the elderly. It is important not to let elderly people live alone. The companion of their children and friends will make life interesting.

**Recommendations**
Based on the finding of for the study, the recommendations are made;
1.  The aged men and women should be taught to develop positive attitudes towards ageing. They should see ageing as a period of achievement, fulfilment and self actualization.

2.  The food given to the elderly people should be balanced with good cooking methods to aid digestion.

3.  Government should help by providing free medical care to all the aged people in Isoko North and South Local Government Areas.

4.  Government and communities should provide recreational and entertainment centres where elderly people will be meeting once, twice and thrice a week to interact with one another to make them active and happy.

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**Table 1: Age range of the elderly people**

|   | Age range | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|-----------|------------|
| A | 65-70 years | 20 | 13.3 |
| B | 71-75 years | 18 | 12.0 |
| C | 76-80 years | 22 | 14.7 |
| D | 81-85 Years | 70 | 46.7 |
| E | Above 35 years | 10 | 6.67 |
|   | Total | 140 | 94.0 |

Table 2: Food usually eaten by the elderly, those really liked, and those avoided.

| Food | Foods usually eaten | | Food really liked | | Foods avoided | |
|------|-----------|-----------|---|---|---|---|
|  | Frequency (f) | Percentage (%) | F | % | F | % |
| Bread/margarine | 95 | 63.3 | 22 | 14.7 | 11 | 7.33 |
| Yam | 83 | 55.3 | 45 | 30.0 | - | - |
| Bread | 105 | 70.0 | 33 | 22.0 | - | - |
| Egg | 91 | 60.7 | 52 | 34.7 | 20 | 13.3 |
| Meat | 110 | 73.3 | 44 | 29.3 | - | - |
| Fish | 101 | 67.3 | 30 | 20.0 | 20 | 13.3 |
| Pork | 60 | 40.0 | 41 | 27.3 | 43 | 28.7 |
| Garri (Eba) | 88 | 58.7 | 61 | 40.7 | 10 | 6.67 |
| Starch | 56 | 37.3 | 71 | 47.3 | 11 | 7.33 |
| Yam flour (amala) | 21 | 14.0 | 12 | 8.00 | 70 | 46.7 |
| Pounded yam | 25 | 16.7 | 28 | 18.7 | 75 | 50.0 |
| Cassava foofoo | 55 | 36.7 | 23 | 15.3 | 57 | 38.0 |
| Semovita | 61 | 40.7 | 11 | 7.33 | 56 | 37.3 |
| Cassavita | 11 | 7.33 | 11 | 7.33 | 82 | 54.7 |
| Plantain | 87 | 58.0 | 62 | 41.3 | 15 | 10.0 |
| Rice+ beans | 101 | 67.3 | 43 | 28.7 | 12 | 10.0 |
| Rice | 85 | 55.3 | 40 | 26.6 | 10 | 6.67 |

**Table 3: Fruits commonly eaten by the elderly in Isoko North and South L.G.A.**

| Fruits | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------|-----------|------------|
| Mango | 61 | 40.7 |
| Oranges | 72 | 48.0 |
| Banana | 70 | 40.7 |
| Pawpaw | 91 | 60.7 |
| Guava | 43 | 28.7 |
| Pineapple | 75 | 50.0 |
| Water melon | 31 | 20.7 |
| Apples | 11 | 7.30 |
| Grape | 13 | 8.67 |

**Table 4: Problems of the elderly people**

| Problems | frequency | Percentage |
|----------|-----------|------------|
| Low income to satisfy needs e.g. feeding | 94 | 62.1 |
| Having dependent relatives | 30 | 20 |
| The desire to sleep all the time | 72 | 40.0 |
| Becoming sick very frequently | 91 | 60.7 |
| Having to go regularly for medical check-up | 61 | 40.7 |
| Difficulty in maintaining high standard of hygiene | 35 | 23.3 |
| Loneliness | 10 | 6.62 |
| Needing attention all the time | 61 | 40.7 |
| Reduced physical activities | 25 | 16.7 |
| Sleeping most of the time | 61 | 40.7 |
| Weakness | 30 | 20 |
| Loss of teeth | 22 | 14.7 |
| Under-nutrition | 33 | 22 |
| Reduced strength | 61 | 40.7 |