

UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES TO INFORMATION-SEEKING BEHAVIOUR AMONGST INTERNALLY DISPLACED WOMEN IN WESTERN EQUATORIAL STATE, SOUTH SUDAN

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Abstract

This study was conducted to explore challenges to Information Behaviour amongst Internally Displaced Women in the Western Equatorial State, South Sudan. This propelled the researcher to conduct the research that sought to shed more light on what prompts internally displaced women in the study area to seek information, specifically establishing how women access information in IDP sites and the challenges experienced by women in accessing information in IDP sites in Western Equatorial State, South Sudan. Qualitative research methodology and an interpretive phenomenology research design were utilized for this research. Eight women leaders among the IDP population in Sites of Western Equatorial State, South Sudan were engaged to obtain necessary information for the study. A purposive sampling technique was employed for the selection of the participants and a Semi-structured interview was utilized for the data collection, while and thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Findings from the study revealed that access to information among women in the Western Equatorial State is through other women, camp coordinators and Media. Challenges to information on health, information on education, food, current trends, finance and relocation among others necessitate internally displaced women in the study area to seek information. This information is normally obtained from documents disseminated at the sites, peer networks, social networks, and camp leadership. Some of the IDPs are not privy to the information due to layers of barriers that impede them. This also serves as a hindrance in them accessing some essential services that ease their stay at the IDP sites. This research therefore recommends collective social cohesion and peace-building efforts of the Government and other stakeholders to ensure durable solutions to the incessant ethno-political violence in the Western Equatorial state, and in South Sudan as a whole to avert the multiple displacements the population is susceptible to.

Keywords: Challenges, Internally Displaced People, Information seeking behavior, Western Equatorial State, Women.

Introduction

No nation or people develop without having proper information that enables them to do so. Information thus, forms the bedrock of the development of a nation and avails necessary knowledge, skillsets, technology, availability of resources and innovation to equip its people on how to go about advancing the country. Well-informed people enable the advancement of knowledge, form the basis for innovation, allow for proper harnessing and utility of resources, and are very integral to the growth and progress of a society (Okoli & Azubuike, 2021). Information-seeking connotes processes individuals undertake in obtaining information to address pressing needs. This encompasses individuals' interaction with information; how they access search, organize, store, process and utilize information and ways in which they with the information. This gives better insight into how internally displaced persons seek and utilize information in their dwelling sites.

An individual's behaviour influences the way he/she accesses or seeks information. Needs and curiosity majorly prompt an individual to access. This is normally in response to finding solutions to specific queries or to be equipped with adequate knowledge for proper decision-making. Prevailing circumstances preempt the information quest. The task of searching for information can be a tedious task in normal settings, it becomes more cumbersome when a person is removed from his familiar environment. Displacements disrupt the balance of the affected people, as they flee from their areas of origin to mostly unknown locations in search of safety and other benefits. Women generally feel the brunt of displacement more, especially as they nurture the family. This prompts them to instinctively seek information that helps them navigate through their responsibilities.

Despite their several limitations, women in displacement keep striving to access information needed by them and their households. How they go about this quest for information and interact with information connotes their information behaviour. Information-seeking behaviour connotes a continuous search for information to respond to specific problems. Many problems in the world require adequate information to be able to tackle them and women specifically are always in the quest for information seeking to enable them to resolve issues in their daily lives. Regardless of where people find themselves, there is always the desire to seek varied forms of information from women on health, education, prices of goods, nutrition, conditions of dwelling environment, employment opportunities and so forth, to help care for their families (Birger, 1997).

Statement of the Problem

Internally displaced women in IDP sites struggle to access information despite how critical information is in the daily lives of individuals. This hampers them from leading a more dignified life as compared to other individuals not faced with similar plight, further worsening their situation, making them more vulnerable and in a dire situation. Scare information or improper information dissemination techniques in sites of the Western Equatorial State, South Sudan, hinders the proper comprehension of the information at the sites by these women

Despite the prevailing need for them to obtain information integral for them to thrive, the inadequate know-how in obtaining the information required remains a prevalent challenge to the IDPs. This was evident when the researcher was approached by most of the IDP women to further clarify the information received at the IDP sites. The IDPs mistook them for a healthcare provider, or other humanitarians providing food aid or other services based on their expectations and understanding of the information provided at the sites.

Research questions

The study was guided by the following questions;

1. How do women access information in IDP sites in Western Equatorial State, South Sudan?
2. What are the challenges experienced by women in IDP sites in the Western Equatorial State, South Sudan in accessing information?

Literature Review

Amadasun (2020) in his study explored the social work services to internally displaced persons from the qualitative paradigm. The author indicated that one unique feature of the social work profession is the centrality of the person-in-environment perspective, which dictates that social work services are holistic. The study examined the nature of social work services to IDPs. 15 social workers in Nigeria constituted the population for the study. Data was collected through a semi-structured interview with the participants in Abuja. Results show that social work services are largely inadequate to address the broad range of needs, issues, and concerns of displaced persons. Feasible suggestions that consider the intersectionality between people and their social environment are offered to social workers. Though this study is not directly a study from the content area of Library and Information Science, it dwells on service provision. All services either social work or from any perspectives, ideas, or subjects are communicated through information dissemination to the audience.

Another study by Ogunode, Chijindu and Jegede (2022) observed that there are many children in IDP sites in Nigeria, not receiving quality education services because of many challenges. This paper examined the problems hindering the provision of education services for children in their various sites across Nigeria. Both qualitative and quantitative resources were sourced online and print materials were used to provide empirical and opinion support to the various points raised in the paper. The paper concluded that inadequate funding, shortage of specialized and professional teachers, lack of modern infrastructural facilities, inadequate instructional materials, lack of data, corruption, poverty, limited school facilities, and instructional challenges of IDPs were the problems hindering the provision of education services for them in the sites hosting them in Nigeria. To ensure the provision of quality education services in all IDP sites across the federation, this paper advances the following suggestions; the federal and state Governments should create a special funding programme for the education of the IDPs in their respective sites; the federal government should direct the Minister of education to create the department of emergency education in the ministry of education to handle the education for IDP sites across the country, the government should develop an effective monitoring and evaluation system to check the financial allocation to all the internally displaced persons sites to prevent diversion of funds, the government should set up a committee to ensure accurate data of school-aged children are collected in all IDP sites to enable effective planning of education for the IDP sites across the country, etc.

Lafta, Aflouk, Lyles and Burnham (2016) conducted a study to determine the health status and health needs of women and children, aged 15 and under, among a sample of this IDP population in Kirkuk, Baghdad, and Karbala governorates. The study observed that continued conflict in Iraq has created an estimated four million internally displaced persons. The bulk of recently displaced persons are in Central Iraq, often in insecure and difficult situations. Data was collected from the senior female in 1216 families which contained 3665 children living in 45 makeshift settlements. Findings revealed that the majority of IDPs were living in tents or religious centers. Repeated displacements were common. Kidnappings were reported by 5.2% of families and 7.9% of families reported the death of a family member during or after displacement. Intentional violence accounted for 72.3% of deaths. Only a third of children in school at the time of displacement continued in school. On average, households had received assistance on 3.2 occasions since displacement, food being the most common form. Access to health services was difficult. Some form of transport was often required. Few women knew where to secure antenatal services, and many did not know where childhood immunization services were available. During or after

displacement 307 women had delivered or were currently pregnant. Complications of pregnancies were common, with a quarter reporting anemia, and 22.1% experiencing hemorrhage. Both communicable and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) were common in the women and children in the survey. Scabies, diarrhea, and lice were common among children. Among women, hypertension accounted for 36.6% of NCDs and type 2 diabetes for 15.9%. Domestic violence directed against women was reported in 17.4% of families and against children in 26.6. Women and children in IDP settlements of Central Iraq experience much vulnerability involving their health, education, and environment, in addition to living in physical danger. While some external assistance was received, much more is needed to meet the needs of a displaced population which is unlikely to return home soon.

Methodology

The qualitative research methodology and interpretive phenomenology research design were used to carry out the study. The ethno-political violence in Tambura County of Western Equatorial State, South Sudan led to the internal displacement of over 80,000 people within the state (REACH Initiative, 2020), among which 55,378 individuals are women. Utilizing the purposive sampling technique, eight (8) participants were selected as the sample size for this study to avert data saturation. The researcher employed semi-structured interviews for data collection and the interview between the subjects and the researcher was recorded using a handheld device. The researcher also closely and personally observed the women, took notes in the process and repeated the questions asked simplistically when needed to ensure clarity. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis.

Results and Discussion

Voice recording was used to collect data from the eight (8) participants in the local dialect (in Azande language), majorly spoken by the people of Western Equatorial State, South Sudan, this was later transferred to phrases and sentences through transcription. The interviewees had priorly consented to be part of the study out of their free will. Varied opinions on information needs, sourcing and understanding of their information needs adequate to meet their expectations were expressed by the women based on their different life experiences. This aligns with the interpretive paradigm qualitative study.

Access to Information to Meet the Needs of Women in IDP Sites in Western Equatorial State, South Sudan

This research objective investigated how women in IDP sites in Western Equatorial State, South Sudan access information to enhance to address the identified information needs. Table 1 provides details on access to information to meet the needs of women in IDP sites in the Western Equatorial State, South Sudan.

Table 1 Access to information by Women in IDP Sites in Western Equatorial State, South Sudan

Research Objective	Themes	Sub-themes
Access information to meet the needs of women in IDP sites in Western Equatorial State, South Sudan	1. I use other women	NIL
	2. Through camp coordinator	NIL
	3. Through Media	1.1 Radio Programmes

Source- Interview Analysis, 2023

Discussion of the emergent themes is as follows starting with the use of other women as a means of understanding information received.

Theme One – I use other women: This theme comprises the view of the participants on the use of other women as a way of accessing any information to meet their needs. Their expressions to the researcher revealed that they rely on the opinion of fellow women in the camp about how they get information. Their narratives on this theme are presented in the following sentences;

“If there is anything I want and I do not understand, I usually meet a woman who stays close to my tent for clarification. Once, she explains the situation to me and how to get it, I am satisfied with the interpretation she gives me” (P5).

“As I am not educated, I cannot read and write in English, so I depend on other women to help me out on how to search and look for information” (P6).

Theme Two- Through camp coordinator: This theme contains the expression of the participant who indicated that access to information is through the assistance received through the IDP site coordinator. This assistance simplifies the creation of ways of searching for information when the need arises, without this guide, it would be impossible to do anything around here. The participants expressed this.

“There is nothing I can do with the help and guidance I get from the camp coordinator. If there is any problem I have or get information about any problem, I do not use it until I show the IDP site coordinator. That is my support” (P3).

Theme Three - Through Media: This theme captured the narratives of the women on how they access and understand information through the media to ensure they cope with everyday life on the IDP site. This theme has one sub-theme; radio programme.

Radio programme: This sub-theme consists of the narratives of the participants who identified that accessing information is through various radio programmes aired. The researcher got to know through the interactions with the participants that total reliance is placed on programmes aired on the radio. Those programmes are instrumental to the accessing and understanding of information especially those with gynecology and obstetrics health problems. It helps the women have a clearer understanding of certain information. Following are the narratives of the participants about this sub-theme.

“Radio programmes are very enlightening. I look forward to the timing of such programmes. Through these programmes, I understood information I had previously encountered at the IDP site. I have had issues with my menstrual cycle; a session was held on the radio. This helped in knowing the remedy to the problem” (P4).

“I listen to programmes on care during pregnancy on the radio. These programmes made to understand the information I had no idea about before. This helped me to know when to seek medical assistance through the medical professionals at the s” (P1 & P2).

Challenges Experienced by Women in Accessing Information in IDP Sites in Western Equatorial State, South Sudan

The research objective investigated challenges experienced by women in IDP sites in the Western Equatorial State, South Sudan in accessing information. These themes are presented in Table 2.

Table 2; Challenges Experienced by Women in IDP Sites in Equatorial State, South Sudan in Accessing Information

Research Objective	Themes	Sub-themes
Challenges experienced by women in IDP sites in Western Equatorial State, South Sudan in accessing information to meet their needs	1. Lack of information centre	1.1 Absence of a library
	2. Educational background	2.1 Search skills

Source- Interview Analysis, 2023

The emergent themes are discussed as follows starting with the lack of information centres.

Theme One -Lack of Information Centres: This theme comprises the narratives of the women about how the lack of information centres poses a challenge to accessing information. The researcher found out that the absence of a designated place to serve as information is a serious bottleneck to getting information for

addressing their information needs. One sub-theme is attached to the main theme—the absence of a library.

Absence of a library: This consists of the expression of the women in the IDP sites in Western Equatorial State, South Sudan. The library according to them is supposed to provide a place where they can engage in information for self-development and relaxation. Unfortunately, there is no provision for a library on the entire site. Following are their narratives.

“I like reading for pleasure. And I get access to library resources at the library in my locality before being displaced. There is no library on this site. It is very difficult to study in this place because of the concentration of people in the site” (P5).

“There is no library at the camp. Even if you want to read, there is no convenient place to do that” (P2, 3, 4)

Theme Two- Educational background: This theme consists of the narratives of the participant about how their educational background has barred them from accessing information to satisfy their informal needs. The sub-theme along with this is search skills.

Search skill: Participants expressed that not possessing searching skills has been a challenge to accessing information through the internet. The researcher found out that since most of them use smartphones, the opportunity to search for information is unlimited. The participants revealed that they cannot browse for information because they lack the skills required to search for information online. Their narratives concerning the sub-theme are presented as follows.

“How would I get information, when I do not know to use the internet? I cannot read, so how can I search for information?” (P6).

“Searching for information is always a serious task for me. I do not know how to get information when I need to solve a problem. I usually require assistance to be able to get information” (P1&2).

Discussion of Findings

Access Information to Meet Their Needs Women in IDP Sites in Western Equatorial State, South Sudan

The research findings revealed that access to information among women in Western Equatorial State to meet their needs is majorly through their women peers (word of mouth), the IDP site coordinators and the media. Access to information is one of the fundamental human rights, denial of which leads to unhealthy living conditions and difficulty in navigating through life. This contributes to the untold hardship faced by IDPs in sites of Western Equatorial state, South Sudan. IDPs like every other person need access to information to be

kept abreast of the latest developments about the conditions which displaced them from their areas of origin.

Abdullah, Elareshi & Kaba (2022) identified the rationale behind respondents' use of Social Networking Services (SNS) for news and information and revealed how much they trusted these platforms. The majority of the respondents were found to be dependent on a variety of SNS media, old or new, to receive news and information, especially in times of crisis and conflict. These devices were found to be very crucial in disseminating information to families, news contributions, and news production.

Challenges Experienced in Accessing Information by Women in IDP Sites in Western Equatorial State, South Sudan

The findings of this study reveal that challenges experienced by women in IDP sites in Western Equatorial State, South Sudan in accessing information to meet their needs are lack of information centre and educational background (Search skills). The availability of information centres and educational institutions is consequential to people living in IDP sites. It will enable the people in IDP sites to keep themselves involved in creative and critical thinking. Educational institutions will provide a learning avenue for those who find themselves in that condition to give a platform for a smooth transition in learning.

This finding is not surprising as studies have reported that the internally displaced face challenges despite spirited efforts of the government of the country and international organizations to support them. Ojo (2017) opined that displaced persons go through numerous challenges even though home governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations offer them support and services. The study revealed that IDPs go through numerous challenges, from shortage of food supply and water, poor sanitation and health care, to lack of security, and the prevalence of rape and abuses in the sites. Similarly, Nwanna & Oparaoha (2018) reported severe socio-economic, health, security and environmental challenges. Likewise, George (2020) challenges IDPs face, such as child rights abuses brought on by reduced parental capacity and prevalent sociocultural norms, limited resources, and institutional thresholds' limitations. This implies that challenges and obstacles are a common phenomenon in concentration locations usually referred to as internally displaced persons sites.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the findings of the study, conclusions can be drawn that several limiting factors (low literacy level, the prevalent cultural norm of male dominance in the society, improper information dissemination among others) prevent

internally displaced women in IDP sites of Western Equatorial state, South Sudan from accessing adequate information to enable them to lead a smooth life in displacement or decide on return. Also, with continuous displacements in the country, more IDP sites are likely to spring up within the study area despite the dwindling humanitarian resources and limited support given to the displaced people. This continues to be a bane in the location unless a critical examination of the root cause of the crisis is examined and a stable solution is found to bring an end to it. More needs to be done by the South Sudan Government of transitional unity, the Government of Western Equatorial State, and other stakeholders in quelling the tensions that lead to displacement and disrupt the normalcy of the people of the state. Also, with the dwindling humanitarian resources and limited support given to the IDPs, the Government, the United Nations and other stakeholders need collective effort towards ensuring the provision of libraries, establishing information centres, organizing regular meetings and extramural classes to enable eased information access for the IDPs in the study area. Especially the women (majorly marginalized amongst this population in terms of access to information) and the respective site coordinators need to promote activities that enable activate information seeking behaviour among the IDPs.

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