



THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FACING YOUTH BASED ORGANIZATIONS IN PROMOTING HEALTH EQUITY IN ISU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Health is a state of complete physical, social and mental wellbeing, and not only the absence of disease and infirmity. To maintain these dimensions of health; and broadly health equity by youth based organizations presents enormous challenges and opportunities. This study examined those challenges faced by youth based organizations and the opportunities motivating them towards promoting health equity in Isu local government area of Imo state. The study aimed to identify and evaluate those challenges affecting youth based organizations as well as the opportunities behind their promotion of health equity. The study assessed the rate at which those challenges and opportunities have impacted health equity promotion in Isu local government. The study employed cross sectional survey and data was collected from 171 sampled respondents using a semi-structured questionnaire. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation where a cut-off point of 2.5 was set out for acceptance of responses. Also, the researcher analyzed the third objective using OLS method of multiple regressions. Result showed that the challenges affecting youth based organisations in promoting health equity were: Limited funding (3.3 mean value), Lack of Infrastructure (2.9 mean value), Tokenism (3.0 mean value), Power Dynamics (2.9 mean value) Culture and linguistic barrier (2.9 mean value) while the opportunities influencing health equity in the study area were: innovative solutions (2.8 mean value), community engagement (2.7 mean value), youth leadership (3.0 mean value), partnership and collaborations (2.8 mean value) and capacity building (2.9 mean value). Partnership and collaborations had a t-value of 32.728 with a probability value of .000 making it the most influencing factor in health equity. It is concluded that youth based organisations are constrained by numerous challenges towards achieving health equity but can still thrive through favourable opportunities prevalent in Isu local government. The study recommended that the youth based organisations should strengthen their partnership and collaborations with Non-governmental organisations and with the government for financial support, skills and expertise needed to promote health equity in Isu local government area of Imo state.

Keywords: Challenges, Health equity, Opportunities, Wellbeing, Youth based organisations.

Introduction

According to World Health Organization (WHO, 2000), health is “a state of complete physical, social and mental wellbeing and not just the absence of disease and infirmity”. pg 12 The centrality of health to national development is very clear; hence it is generally understood that improving health status and increasing life expectancy contribute to long-term economic development. Based on this reality, Alubo (2012)



submits that health is a much-valued concept; hence it is even eulogized in Nigeria variously as being wealth and a healthy nation is viewed as a wealthy nation). Alubo (2012) elaborates that Nigeria's appreciation for health is even heard from common daily greetings between neighbours across different cultures

Reiterating the importance of health in human societies, Rice and Smith (2001) stress that among the many objectives set for health care systems by policy makers, the pursuit of concepts such as equal access to health care, or equal health outcomes are frequently dominant. The prominence of such objectives suggests that a concern for health equity is an important element of the ethical bases underlying the health care systems (Raheem, 2006).

Moreover, Health equity refers to the fair and just distribution of health resources, opportunities, and outcomes to all individuals and communities. Health equity ensures that everyone has an equal opportunity to attain full health potential. It addresses systemic barriers and disparities that prevent certain groups from achieving optimal health. Health promotion is a vital component of public health practice. During the last two decades, health promotion has been consolidated and institutionalized. As such, public health practitioners, policy-makers, academicians and researchers have recognized the role of health promotion in improving public health and professional associations and scholarly journals have revolved on health promotion (Pivot and Jones, 2011). In 2009, health promotion was re-defined as: "the art and science of helping people discover the synergies between their core passions and optimal health, enhancing their motivation to strive for optimal health, and supporting them in changing their lifestyle to move toward a state of optimal health. Optimal health is a dynamic balance of physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and intellectual health. Lifestyle change can be facilitated through a combination of learning experiences that enhance awareness, increase motivation, and build skills and, most important, through the creation of opportunities that open access to environments that make positive health practices the easiest choice" (O'Donnell, 2009).

Though a common target for health-improving efforts, young people are not often regarded as agents of change for healthier communities. However, a growing number of successful health-supportive policy, environment, and systems-change efforts trace their impetus to youth involvement. Not only are youth proving to be catalysts and prolific communicators in social movements, their involvement signals a potential for career choices and civic stewardship that will improve the Nigerian population health and equity in the years to come. Emerging areas of research is indeed beginning to show that youths' organization can contribute to both community and youth development (Ginwright and James, 2002; Christens and Kirschner, 2011).



Health does not just happen in hospitals and doctors' offices. We know that health in the broad sense also happens in the places where people live, work, learn and play. Making health happen in nonmedical settings is largely dependent on the contributions of people working on behalf of communities such as the youth based organisations. Youth based organizations have become an increasingly common approach in promoting public health. This is as youth based organisations motivate and prepare community members to identify shared problems and to work collectively toward health solutions. Youth based organisations may focus on health improvement for reasons that are both ethical (e.g., "nothing about me without me") and practical (e.g., communities have essential knowledge and assets not available from outside experts). Common targets of youths' organizations for health services in recent times include; HIV/AIDS prevention, childhood obesity prevention, health care reform, and mental health services.

These health promotion endeavours of young people thus depict many youth based organizations as movements toward "developing within a neighbourhood or community a base of young people committed to altering power relationships and creating meaningful institutional change" (Sullivan, Edwards, Johnson and McGillicuddy, 2003). Thus, projects that are social determinants of public health and aimed at impacting public health, especially in low income communities often engage these youth health based organizations. In this engagement, the youths advance influence government health strategies, policies and system change. Youth are vital to this cause because they live the everyday reality of their neighbourhoods, have knowledge of the community's strengths and vulnerabilities, and understand the workings of culture and the community's shared values. As such, their views about community's health needs and potential solutions inform the core of collective community-based health improvement efforts, and help to assure that various communities cue into the health improvement practices. These efforts are however, catalysed by severable opportunities which motivate these youths to function. Yet, the various youth based organizations at the same time face many challenges in their verge to improve public health. This study burdens the task of determining these challenges and opportunities facing youth based organizations in promoting health equity in Isu local government area of Imo state, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of health promotion should be to engage individuals to reason about what they value and how they can adopt these values. But, in several youth based organisations, there are unspecified values as regard health made known to all members. This has affected the operational efficiency of so many youth based organisations in Isu local government area (LGA) of Imo state. However, there is also the need to unravel the opportunities available for these youth based organizations in Isu LGA towards the promotion of health equity. Such opportunities can only be well articulated when the challenges affecting these organisations are well stated;



hence, this paper discusses the challenges and opportunities facing youth based organizations in promoting health equity in Isu LGA of Imo state, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The main objective of this study is to assess the challenges and opportunities facing youth based organizations in promoting health equity in Isu LGA of Imo state, Nigeria. The study specifically;

1. Identifies the challenges affecting youth based organizations in promoting health equity in Isu LGA of Imo state, Nigeria.
2. Evaluates the opportunities influencing youth based organizations in promoting health equity in Isu LGA of Imo state, Nigeria.
3. Examines the rate at which the challenges and opportunities has impacted health equity promotion in Isu LGA of Imo state, Nigeria.

Research questions

The following research questions were addressed:

1. What are the challenges affecting youth based organizations in promoting health equity in Isu LGA of Imo state, Nigeria?
2. What are the opportunities influencing youth based organizations in promoting health equity in Isu LGA of Imo state, Nigeria?
3. At what do the challenges and opportunities has impact health equity promotion in Isu LGA of Imo state, Nigeria?

Significance of the Study

The study will benefit various rural communities because it gives impetus to youth based organization in the work of promoting and improving health equity in the rural communities. The study indeed serves as a wakeup call to youths on their role towards promoting health equity in Isu LGA of state, Nigeria.

Future researchers will find this study very useful by using it as a reference material. This is as the study contributes to an existing literature on the promoting health equity.

Scope of the Study

This study is limited to the challenges and opportunities facing youth based organizations in the work of promoting health equity in Isu LGA of state, Nigeria. The study identifies the challenges, evaluates the available opportunities surrounding youth based organizations in the work of promoting health equity, and examines the rate with which these challenges and opportunities impacted health equity promotion in Isu LGA of Imo state Nigeria.

Gaps in the existing related literature

Saulat (2015) did a work on health promotion; challenges and opportunities. The work failed to include youth based organisations and integrate the effects of the



challenges and opportunities faced by the youth based organizations in health promotion. Thus, Saulat (2015) only presented a literature on the challenges and opportunities surrounding health promotion.

On the other hand, Adegboyega (2008) explored the dilemma of equity and social exclusion in healthcare delivery services in Nigeria. He argues that Nigeria's national health care delivery indices can only be improved if services are available, accessible and affordable. Despite this effort, Adegboyega (2008), failed to include the role of the youths in facilitating affordable and accessible health services and the constraints these youths may encounter.

Thomy, (2016), looked into the challenges and strategies for sustaining youth-friendly health services. They however failed to include the contributions of the youths and the opportunities inducing these youths to engage in these services.

Conceptual Framework

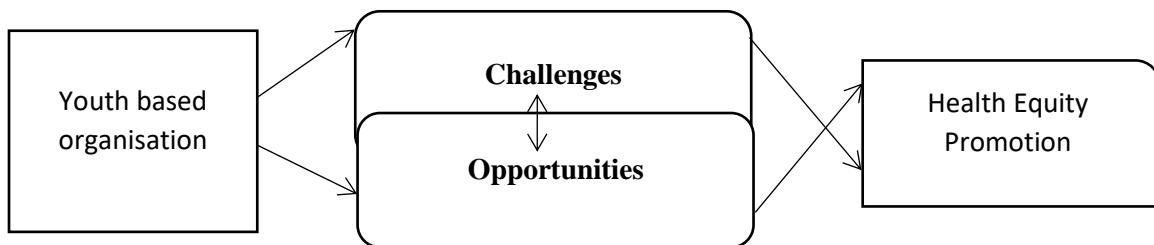


Fig 2.1 : Conceptual chart demonstrating the challenges and opportunities affecting youth based organization in promoting health equity and effects of these challenges and opportunities on health equity promotion in Isu LGA of state, Nigeria.

i. Youth based Organization

The concept 'Youth based organizations' have been increasingly identified as important institutions that promote healthy youth development. Recent reviews have documented many positive impacts of these youth based organization, such as; enhanced health promotion initiatives, interpersonal skills, self-control, self-efficacy, commitment to school and academic achievement, as well as decreased problem behaviours; such as decreased substance use, school misbehaviour, aggression, truancy, and high-risk sexual behaviour among the people (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, and Hawkins, 1999)

ii. Health Equity Promotion

1. Health promotion is a means of increasing individual and collective participation in health action. It is also the strengthening of health programmes through the integrative use of various methods. These methods are combined through



comprehensive approaches which ensure action at all levels of the society, leading to enhanced health impact.

2. Health promotion practice has been in existence for a long time even though the use of the term to refer to a specific field started only in the 1980s. The development of health promotion was greatly influenced by the evolution of other broad approaches to human development; such as:

- (a) The increased demand for social justice and for the rights of women, children and minorities:
- (b) The Health-for-All concept:
- (c) Movements to protect and improve the physical environment:
- (d) The increased attention being paid to poverty as a major underlying cause of illness.

3. The development of health promotion is part of the global search for effective means of preventing diseases and improving general living conditions. There has progressively been increased recognition of the need to improve health through addressing behavioural lifestyle (harmful cultural practices) and other underlying socioeconomic, physical and biological factors considered contextually broad determinants of health.

iii. Opportunities for Health Promotion

A number of governments around the world are committed to health promotion for their countries. International organizations; such as the World Health Organization has responded to this commitments of their member countries by providing support in health promotion and in developing policies, programs and activities related to health promotion (Rice, 2012). Health care visits for various purposes are opportunities for health promotion activities. It is especially important in the case of maternal health where women report routinely for antenatal care. These visits can be utilized to promote health in this vulnerable group of population (Moos, 2002). Visits for childhood vaccination and growth monitoring can be utilized for health promotion to improve health of children and young adults. Follow-up visits of patients with chronic disease also provide an opportunity for health promotion activities.

A valuable opportunity for promoting health arises from the availability of advanced technology and electronic means of communication. The internet has broadened the scope of health care beyond its traditional boundaries. Mass media has an important role in promoting health. Social media can communicate the health messages to a wider, diverse group of audience.



Methodology

i. Study Design

This research adopted quantitative techniques and a cross sectional study which involves observing a defined population at a single point in time or over a short time period. These techniques were appropriate for this study as it helps to gather data from a defined population and makes it easy for the researcher to avoid bias and ambiguous survey that might be very difficult in realizing (Okoye, 2016).

ii. Area and population of the Study

The study covers Isu local government area in Imo State of Nigeria. Its headquarter is Umundugba. Other communities in Isu L.G.A are Amandugba, Ekwe, Uburuekwe, Isunjaba, Amrie, Omanze, Ebenator Ekwe AND Oboro Amurie. The estimated population of Isu LGA is 111,213, with the vast majority being members of the Igbo ethnic group. Isu LGA covers a total area of 40 km squared and has an average temperature of 26 °C. The LGA is forested with average wind speed in the area put at 11 km/h. The average humidity level of Isu LGA is 71 percent while the area has a number of rivers and streams flowing through its territory. In Isu, the dry season is hot, muggy, and partly cloudy whereas the wet season is warm, oppressive, and overcast. The average annual temperature ranges from 65°F to 88°F, with lows of 59°F and highs of 91°F being rare. The total youth based organizations in the study area were 5 with a population size of 300 in a whole.

iii. Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The sample size was determined using Yaro Yamane formula.

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where: n = sample size

N = Population (300)

e = Tolerable error of 5 (0.05)

I = constant

n = 300

$$1+300(0.05)^2$$

=171, hence 171 persons becomes the sample size of the study.

Purposive random sampling technique was used in selecting 171 respondents from a population size of 300. The selected respondents were perceived to have knowledge of the subject under study.

iv. Data Collection Tool

Data for the study was collected with a semi-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was structured in 5 likert scale format of Strongly agree (5), Agree (4), Disagree (3), Undecide (2) and Strongly disagree (1).



vi. Data Collection Procedure

The structured questionnaire was administered to the 171 respondents who constitute the sample size; they were allowed to fill the questionnaire, giving their opinion to their saturation point. After one week, the researcher retrieved the questionnaire from them. Another questionnaire with similar contents was given to the respondents again to test the consistency of their responses.

v. Method of Data Analysis

Objectives (i) and (ii) were analysed using descriptive statistics like mean and standard deviation, leaving a cut-off point of 2.5 for acceptance of responses while objective 3 was analysed using ordinary least square (OLS) method of multiple regression model.

Result and discussion

Table 4.1. Mean Scores on challenges affecting youth based organizations in promoting health equity in Isu LGA of Imo state

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	ΣFx	N	\bar{X}	Decision
		4	3	2	1				
1	Limited funding	76	86	0	5	567	171	3.3	Accepted
2	Lack of Infrastructure	60	55	30	26	491	171	2.9	Accepted
3	Tokenism	86	20	46	19	515	171	3.0	Accepted
4	Power Dynamics	61	65	15	30	499	171	2.9	Accepted
5	Culture and linguistic barrier	65	48	30	28	492	171	2.9	Accepted

From the table above, it was agreed that the challenges affecting youth based organisations in promoting health equity in Isu LGA of Imo state, Nigeria were: Limited funding (3.3 mean value), Lack of Infrastructure (2.9 mean value), Tokenism (3.0 mean value), Power Dynamics (2.9 mean value) Culture and linguistic barrier (2.9 mean value). This is in line with the views of Udo (2019) which portrayed the listed challenges as affecting health equity promotion in human societies.

**Table 1.2: Mean Scores on the Opportunities influencing youth based organizations in promoting health equity in the study area in Isu LGA of Imo state.**

S/N	ITEMS	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	ΣFx	N	\bar{X}	Decision
1	Innovative Solutions	44	72	30	25	477	171	2.8	Accepted
2	Community engagement	46	65	29	31	468	171	2.7	Accepted
3	Youth Leadership	82	30	36	23	513	171	3.0	Accepted
4	Partnership and collaborations	51	65	21	34	475	171	2.8	Accepted
5	Capacity Building	75	38	30	28	502	171	2.9	Accepted

Source: Author's computation, 2025

From the table above, it was agreed that the opportunities influencing promotion of health equity by youth based organizations in Isu LGA of Imo state are: innovative solutions (2.8 mean value), community engagement (2.7 mean value), youth leadership (3.0 mean value), partnership and collaborations (2.8 mean value) and capacity building (2.9 mean value).

Table 4.3: The rate at which the challenges and opportunities has impacted health equity promotion in Isu LGA of Imo state, Nigeria

Model	Coefficients ^a					
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	-.384	.208			-1.845	.068
Innovative Solutions	.082	.045	.035		1.813	.073
Lack of infrastructure	-.100	.025	-.079		-4.040	.000
1 Cultural and linguistic barriers	-.023	.018	-.024		-1.288	.201
Research and Evaluation	.158	.048	.057		3.306	.001
					.063	.253



Model	Coefficients^a			T	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Community Engagement	.073	.027	.053	2.675	.009	.019	.128
Capacity Building	.141	.062	.037	2.277	.025	.018	.263
Limited funding	-.024	.066	-.009	-.360	.720	-.155	.107
Youth Leadership	.010	.034	.009	.289	.773	-.058	.078
Partnership and collaborations	.954	.029	1.007	32.728	.000	.896	1.012
R²	0.90						

a. Dependent Variable: Health Equity

The table seeks to explain the rate at which the challenges and opportunities has impacted health equity promotion in Isu LGA of Imo state, Nigeria. The analysis showed that at the rate of 90% variation (regression coefficient), Factors like engagement, capacity building, youth leadership, partnership and collaborations were positively significant in the promotion of health. Partnership and collaborations had a t-value of 32.728 with a probability value of .000 making it the most influencing factor in health equity. This is in line with Osoh (2011) who posited that the more opportunity giving to the youth, the more health equity can be promoted in rural communities. Factors like Lack of infrastructure, cultural and linguistic barriers, and limited funding which are challenges were negatively significant. This is to say that opportunities and challenges affect health equity in the study area.

Conclusion

This paper looked into the challenges and opportunities facing youth based organizations in promoting health equity in Isu LGA of Imo state, Nigeria. The study identified the challenges affecting youth based organizations and valued the opportunities available to the youth based organizations in promoting health equity in Isu LGA. The study as well examined the rate at which these challenges and opportunities impacted health equity promotion in Isu LGA. It was observed that the challenges affecting youth based organisations in promoting health equity in Isu LGA were: Limited funding (3.3 mean value), Lack of Infrastructure (2.9 mean value), Tokenism (3.0 mean value), Power Dynamics (2.9 mean value) Culture and linguistic barrier (2.9 mean value) while the opportunities influencing health equity in the study area were: innovative solutions (2.8 mean value), community engagement (2.7 mean value), youth leadership (3.0 mean value) , partnership and collaborations (2.8 mean value) and capacity building (2.9 mean value). In the light of these findings



therefore, the study concludes that youth based organisations should strengthen their partnerships and collaborations with Non-governmental organisations and with the government for financial support, skills acquisition and expertise needed to promote health equity in Isu LGA of Imo state.

Recommendations

The study recommends the following.

1. Youth Engagement: Government of Imo state and Isu in particular should actively involve young people in decision-making processes related to health initiatives.
2. Culturally Responsive Programs: Government of Imo state and Isu in particular should develop health programs that are culturally sensitive and responsive to diverse youth needs.
3. Address Social Determinants: Government of Imo state and Isu in particular should focus on addressing social determinants of health like education, poverty, and housing affecting youth.
4. Health Education and Awareness: Government of Imo state and Isu in particular should provide accurate health information and promote awareness on issues impacting the youths (e.g., mental health, sexual health).
5. Partnerships: Youth based organizations should foster partnerships in various communities, healthcare providers and policymakers.
6. Empower Youth Leadership: Government of Imo state and Isu in particular should support and empower youth leaders to drive health initiatives and advocate for change.
7. Use Digital Platforms: Youth based organizations should leverage digital tools and social media to reach youths with health information and vocation for health services.
8. Inclusivity: Youth based organizations should ensure inclusiveness of diverse youth populations, including LGBTQ+, marginalized ethnic groups and those with disabilities in the promotion of health equity and services.
9. Capacity Building: Government of Imo state and Isu in particular should provide training and capacity-building opportunities for youth organizations on health equity.

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