

THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF THE GIRL-CHILD

BY

AGHAUCHE, E.E & EKWELUNDU C

DEPARTMENT OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE

UNIZIK AWKA

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the information needs of the girl child; and the sources of meeting these information needs. It also highlights some factors that affect the girl child in her information seeking behavior. Some of these factors are socio-economic, biological/hereditary among others. Such problems pose barriers and challenges to the information needs of the girl child. The paper ended with recommendations on how the government can assist both the girl child and her parents to mould her into a fulfilled woman that can contribute meaningfully to the society.

INTRODUCTION

The need for information utilization by the girl-child cannot be over-emphasized. This is because information is a reliable ingredient for human existence. It has become an essential basis for human progress. Information in modern times has assumed an indispensable status in everyday programme of individuals, organizations and nations. Its relevance has transcended through all the canals of human activities; and it is now universally recognized as a powerful resource that cannot only compete with other resources, but also determines the extent other important resources can be developed. Hence in the world today, the success or otherwise of all decisions are dependent on availability and usability of relevant information. Lack of relevant information at any given time is a dire problem. The above facts prove that human beings including the girl child require basic information to function.

It is however destructive to block people's access to information, and lack of such accessibility to information a long way to affect societal development goes. The girl child like other human beings have various information needs; like health information, educational information, personal information, etc. when these information needs are met, the girl child is better equipped to handle the challenges of life in her bid to grow into womanhood, such as unwanted pregnancy, rape, etc. On the other hand, if these needs are not met; the girl child remains in a state of confusion. Aina (2004) supporting this view opined that information helps to increase the state of knowledge of recipient, as well as resolve or reduce uncertainties. Information enables the girl child to construct a framework by which she understands her situation and the world around her. It is the way to empowerment and opportunity. On the other hand, lack of information and knowledge keeps people in poverty (coraggio, 2011). To avoid this, the girl child needs relevant information.

Who is a Girl Child?

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, Special Prize Edition (2001) defined a girl as a female child. In the same vein, Offorma (2009) as cited by Ifijieh (2011) defined a girl-child as a biological female offspring from birth to eighteen years of age. This includes all the stages of development; that is, from infancy to late adolescence. A girl child is her parent's property and responsibility at childhood and her husband's property and responsibility in adulthood when she eventually gets married. This presupposes that the girl child is dependent on assistance from those around her for survival. Anammah (1995) as cited by Elisha (2006) noted that traditionally, the girl child is regarded as the weaker sex; and as such she is always deprived and exploited. In other words, the girl child is often faced with discriminations from the earliest stages of life through childhood and into adulthood. This is evident in the denial of her fundamental rights and needs. Thus, it becomes imperative that

the girl child be well informed so as to be rightly empowered to fight for her rights, as it is said that knowledge is power.

Why Does the Girl Child Need Information

The girl child needs information more than any other category of persons in the world today. The level of corruption and moral decadence in the society calls for greater enlightenment on the part of the girl child who is at the receiving end. She needs to be aware of the prevailing evil around her so as to guard herself against such attacks. The pages of our newspapers are replete with stories of rape, violence against women, child abuse, early marriage, abortion, and child trafficking, etc.

Innocent Anoruo, a columnist in Sunday Independence of April 29,2012 narrated what he read in This Day newspaper editorial of October 22,2008 in which he lamented, the alarming incidence of rape, saying that statistics have shown that less than 20 percent of rape cases are never reported, as most victims are often unable to face the social stigma that follows public knowledge of the ordeal. Speaking further on the evils of rape, he gave some instances for rape which he regard as demonic as follows: (i) Man 43, rapes 11-year old girl (Daily Independent, January 24, 2005) (ii) Teacher charged with raping toddler (Daily Independent, August 27, 2006) (iii) Man 29, rape eight-year old girl, Daily independent, April 2, 2009) (iv) Man, 72 arraigned for allegedly raping 12-year-old girl (Daily Independent September, 2009); these incidence of rapes were metted to the girl child; by adult male old enough to be their fathers and grand fathers.

He also observed that gang-rape is a fad that is sweeping across Africa now. According to him, last year, there was a 10-minute video posted on the internet where a girl, reportedly a student of Abia State University (ABSU), was gang-raped; and this year 42 secondary school students were rape one after another by 12-man armed robber gang.(Vanguard, April 2,2012).

Child labour is also another canker worm that is eating deep into the fabrics of Africa; especially on the part of the girl. It is against this background that Bonsu (2012) said that in Ghana, like most African countries, child labour is still predominantly high because of the high level of poverty. She then stated that she, a Queen mother and other Queen mothers in Ashanti region are working tirelessly to ensure that child labour, maternal and infant mortality are totally eliminated or reduced to barest minimum.

There are increasing incidences of child trafficking and human rights violation of which the girl child is most vulnerable. The child is trafficked and sent to foreign lands to serve as house maids or house helps, cheap labour and prostitutes. The right of the girl child is violated on daily basis. Sometimes she is denied the basic necessities of life. In some cultures she is denied the right to education, in preference to the male child. All these evil practices happen and are still happening because the girl child does not know her right and does not know what to do to protect herself. It is unfortunate that the girl child whose right is being violated is ignorant. Who will enlighten her? She needs to be enlightened through the provision of relevant information. It is important at this point to determine the information needs of the girl child.

Information Needs of the Girl Child

Information is central to human existence. Since the dawn of civilization human beings have required information to cope with day-to-day living and even to satisfy curiosity. It is the first step to every healthy choice.

Hence Fourie (1991) states that children and young people have the right to gain access to correct and up-to-date information which will enable them to make decisions in matters concerning their personal needs.

The girl child like every other human being needs information on various aspects of her life. It can be information on health, education, recreation, Vocation and career, etc. It can also be factual information that would enrich her knowledge to better understand the world around her so as to effectively fit into the society and make meaningful contributions. The information needs of the girl child can be categorized thus:

- Health information
- Educational information
- Personal information
- Vocational and career information
- General information

Health Information

Health information needs of the girl child refer to the information required by the girl child on health matters. She needs information on what to do to stay healthy like the need for rest, she also needs to be well informed on health issues such as HIV/AIDS, breast cancer, cervical cancer, the danger of early marriage, teenage pregnancy, the use of contraceptives and birth control measures. It is in line with this that Yinka Shokunbi reported in Sunday Independence of October 7,2012 that Nigeria joined the rest of the world to declare October cancer awareness month as a symbol of understanding the devastating nature of the dreaded disease. She further stated that the Medical Women Association of Nigeria (MWAN) urged

for the mass screening of young girls and women of cervical cancer. Adequate information given to the girl child will equip her against the above health issues and many others.

Education Information

Education is one of the fundamental rights of the girl child. Education will transform the girl child and empower her. The UN convention on the rights of the child in article 28(1) recognizes the right of the child to education, including the girl child, she needs necessary information that will enable her acquire or access education. It is education that will transform and equip her. Denying her access to education will make her a liability to the society, and as such vulnerable to evil practices. The girl child needs to be well informed to be able to develop mentally, socially, emotionally, spiritually, politically and economically (Offorma,2009).

Educating the girl child will help to develop self confidence in her and also protect her from sexual abuse, child trafficking, unwanted pregnancy and early marriage. It will also help in reducing children and maternal mortality rate.

Personal Information

This deals with information directed towards the personal needs of the girl child. It can be as a result of the situation in which she finds herself or questions imposed on her by her peers and adults around her, due to her limited world experience since she is not yet fully developed physically, cognitively and socially. Her personal information needs can be on school work like projects, assignments, etc. It can also be on relationships with friends, peers and opposite sex; and even on self-development and fashions; what and how to wear it.

Vocational Information

This has to do with the information the girl child needs to make good career choice. It involved information on choosing the right school, the right employer and engaging a prominent and capable mentor. This can be done by parents, peers, teachers and counselors who provide the girl child with both career information and guided experience.

UN Convention on the Rights of the child in article 28(1b) encourages the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, making them available and accessible to every child. Vocational and career information has to do with the information the girl child needs to make good career choice.

General Information

The girl child needs information on general issues and current events happening around her. It can be on politics, sports, religion, social activities, current events, civic duties etc. she needs information on her civil responsibilities as a good citizen of her country, as well as her human rights. She equally needs information on her heritage/cultural identity. To know where she originated from and what her culture demands of her.

Information Sources

There are many sources of information through which the information needs of the girl child can be met. These include; family and friends, school, mass media, libraries and internet.

Family and friends

The family is the first interaction the girl child has with the world. The family includes the parents, immediate and extended family members. Friends are also considered in this group. The girl child consults her mother or older relatives on issues that baffle her, like health relationship and cultural issues. It is believed that children learn by example from their parents; and that is why the family is expected to identify most of the information needs of the children. However, most parents and friends do not have accurate information or the ability to communicate information effectively to the girl child. Some do not even have the time to do so.

School

The school is another source where the girl child acquires information about her various needs. The school curriculum is enriched to provide the needed information of the girl child, thus, empowering her to face the challenges outside the school environment. The teachers and the guidance counselors are always ready to help the girl child tackle her problems. The school also provides information materials that will help prepare the girl child adequately.

Mass Media

This is an information source used to communicate with the masses. It includes newspapers, radios, television, etc. The mass media provides relevant information to the girl child on current events and happenings around her.

Library

The library, whether school or public, is a very important information source to the girl child. As a storehouse of knowledge, it is equipped with current and relevant materials that are great assets to educational programmes. The library through its information resources can arouse the interest and satisfy the curiosity of the girl child, and help her to develop confidence in her self-worth and faith in her ability to cope with challenges of life(Elisha,2006).

Internet

It is a medium that connects the whole world. Through it, the girl child can have access to information all over the world, if she is information and communication technology (ICT) compliance. The internet according to Williams and Sawyer (2007) is a worldwide computer network that connects thousands of other smaller computer networks; these networks link educational, commercial, non-profit organizations, military entities as well as individuals. It is a medium that connects the whole world and an important source of information. Through it, the girl child can have access to information from all over the world.

Mudawi (2005) opined that the introduction of the internet and its wide range of resources and applications can be considered as the most important event of recent times as far as the development of information provision is concerned.

Factors Affecting the Information Needs of the Girl Child

The information needs of the girl child are influenced by certain factors which includes socio-economic and biological/hereditary factors among others.

Socio-Economic Factors

The socio-economic status of the family affects the lifestyle and the information needs of the girl child. It is an obvious fact that families with high socio-economic status are able to provide their children with high quality child care, books and wide range of resources to promote and support young children's development. Whereas, families with low socio-economic status cannot afford to provide these materials.

Biological/hereditary factors

Certain biological and hereditary factors from the family influence the information need of the girl child. The needs can be on health related issues like asthma. Sickle cell anemia, diabetes, etc. for instance, the pains and agonies of sickle cell disorder are so indescribable that timely information is needed to avoid its occurrence. It is in view of this that Yinka Shokunbi reported in Sunday Independence of 26 August 2012, that a non-governmental organization in Nigeria, DABMA Foundation, launched a book titled "Sickle Cell Disorder: Early Warning Signals" with which it is advocating for the teaching of genotype and genetic disorders in schools, so that everyone will have the benefit of understanding in details what it really means to have children with the disorder.

Besides the above factors there are other challenges that militate against the information needs of the girl child. One of such challenges is illiteracy of parents. In many developing countries like Nigeria, many parents are illiterate and so do not know the value of providing information to the girl child. Inaccessibility of information and lack of information materials or resources also affect information needs of the girl child in no small measure. It is obvious that the girl child can only utilize information and information sources that are accessible to her.

Lack of ICT skills is also another challenge facing the girl child. Inability of the girl child to operate the computer efficiently will limit her on gaining access to materials in the internet. This is why it is necessary that the girl child as a matter of urgency acquires ICT skills so as to access formation globally.

CONCLUSION

The girl child must have basic information if she must succeed in life Information is so vital and indispensable that no meaningful progress will take place without it. Hence the information needs of the girl child would have to be met for her to overcome the enormous challenges of life.

Since the parents alone cannot meet all the information needs of the girl child; it becomes necessary that all stakeholders be involved. It is therefore recommended that the government should take steps to ensure that the girl child be provided with needed information.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like Young Women Christian Association (YWCA) should join the battle in creating awareness for the rights of the girl child. YWCA, is an international organization widely known for training young girls. Other NGOs, philanthropist and good spirited individuals are also called upon to partners with the government and its agencies in providing necessary information to the girl child.

REFERENCES

- Agosto, D. E. and Hugnes-Hassel, S. (2006). Tarards a model of the everyday life information needs of urban teenagers, partl; theoretical mode. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*,57(10).Retrieved on April 3,2012 from <http://www.libsnap.dom.edu/reserves/Lis9505alvatore-Toward.pdf>
- Aina, L. O. (2004). *Library and Information Science text for Africa*. Ibadan:third world information services Ltd.

- Anoruo, I. (2012). Rape: Time to spit on graves. Sunday independence April 29,2012.
- Azubuike, O. C. (2011). Influential factors affecting the attitude of students towards Vocational/technical subjects in secondary schools in southeastern Nigeria. Journal of educational and social Research,(2). Retrieved on April 14, 2012 from <http://www.mcser-orglimages/stories/.../ozioma%20azubuike.Pdf>
- Azubuike, K. A. (2000). Vision 2010 the relevance of library and information services on national development “arts and social science forum journal vol.2 No.4.
- Bonsu, N. A. S. (2007). I respect my husband to keep my home. Sunday Independent January 1, 2012.
- Colarossi, D. (2007).The information needs of parents raising children between the Ages of three and five. A thesis presented to the faculty of the Rossier school of Education University of Southern California in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of marriage and family therapy. Retrieved on April 14, 2012 from <https://partfolio.du.edu/portfolio/getportfoliofile?lid = 172233>
- Coraggio, F. (2011). Information needs of women in developing countries. Retrieved on April 16,2012from<http://www.slideshare.net/fcoraggio/information-needs-of-women-in-Developing-countries>.
- Coraggio, F. (2010). Women's information needs in developing countries. Retrieved on April 10,2010from<http://www.slideshare.net/fcoraggio/informationneeds-of-women-in-developing-countries>.
- Elisha, M. J. (2006). The importance of school library in Girl-child Education with special Reference to Northern Nigeria. Samarujournal of information studies,6(1&2).Retrieved on April 7,2012 from <http://www.ajol.info/indix.php.sjis/article.viewfile/40594/8127>
- Fourie, J. A. (1991). Information needs of young people. Free state libraries, April/June: 1-4.
- Hihej, G. I. (2011). Issue in Girl-child Education in Nigeria: implications for library and information support. Retrieved on April 16, 2012) from <http://www.readperiodicals.com/201112/252211249/.html>

