

Strategies Used by Housewives in Meeting the Food Needs of Families in Edem Community, Nsukka Local Government Area, Enugu State

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ABSTRACT

Background: For the optimum development, survival, growth and good health of family members, food as an important basic human need is required. Therefore, hunger and malnutrition among members results when their food needs are not met.

Objective: The study investigated the strategies used by housewives in meeting the food needs of families in Edem community, Nsukka L.G.A., Enugu State.

Methods: Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The study population comprised of 3,257 housewives in Edem community. The sample size was 107 housewives who were selected from the total population using simple random sampling. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection. Data collected were analysed using means and standard deviation.

Result: The findings of this study showed that strategies employed by housewives in meeting the food needs of family members in Edem include, home gardening, buying food in season and bulk purchase among others. In addition, inflation, low income level and harsh weather and climate conditions, are among the economic factors that affect the availability of food items in families. The result also showed factors that affect the food needs of family which include finance, preference and food in season among others. Major meals consumed by families in Edem community include maize pudding, bean pottage and jollof rice among others.

Conclusion: The nutritional competence of housewives helps them with the knowledge of food in season and in making wise budgets for food items; which in turn helps them to meet the food needs of family members.

Keywords: Food, Family, Housewives, Strategies, Community

Introduction

In developing countries like Nigeria, studies have shown that there is a considerably large number of people suffering different ailments, such as obesity and coronary heart diseases, due to deficient, excessive and

imbalance food intake (1). Food is defined as any edible substance, either solid or liquid that nourishes the body when taken (2). The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) ascertains that food functions first to provide energy; and the

body needs energy to sustain involuntary processes essential for continuing life (20). Energy is also required for various activities which convert foods into utilizable nutrients required for growth and development (3). In addition, food consumed, also helps to maintain the structure of the body and in repair of worn out tissues as well as for body building (4). Furthermore, a study by Serra-Majem, et.al. showed that food regulates the activities of the body including heartbeat, body temperature, muscle contraction, water balance, blood clotting and removal of waste products from the body (1). Food helps in improving the immune system and resistance power of the body (1). Therefore eating the right kind of food in right amounts ensures good health of family members.

The family and its members need to be in the know of what food and nutrition is all about. There is therefore an urgent need to create an awareness of nutritional and food needs of various family members and ways of meeting them so as to ensure proper health and fulfilment in life (5). For instance, infants require exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of their lives and introduction of appropriate complementary foods afterwards (6). The preschool and school aged children are growing rapidly and are very active. The homemaker is to provide them with body building and energy giving food in the right amount each day (7). Adolescence is an important period of nutritional vulnerability due to increased dietary requirements for growth and development (8). The phenomenal growth that occurs in adolescence creates increased demands for energy and other nutrients. Failure to consume an adequate diet at this time can result in delayed sexual maturation and can slow linear growth (7). The implication is that adequate foods are to be given to different family members for optimum development.

For the optimum development, survival, growth and good health of family members, food as an important basic human need is required. If sufficient foods are available and accessible, the household then has to make decisions concerning what food is to be purchased, prepared and consumed. Utilization of food refers to the ability of the human body to take food and convert it into energy. Utilization requires not only an adequate diet but also a healthy physical environment, including safe drinking water, adequate sanitary facilities and an understanding of proper health care, food preparation and storage processes (9). Adequacy

means that the food consumed must satisfy dietary needs, taking into account the individual's age, living condition, health, occupation and sex (10). The right to food has been recognized in several International Conventions. The food right states that all individuals regardless of their race, colour, sex, language, religion, nationality and property size, have the right to adequate food and the right to be free from hunger (10). That is, all individuals have the right to not be in need of food at all times.

Food need can be said to be insufficient food intake by an individual for a healthy life (9). According to a report, food needs exist whenever the availability of nutritionally adequate and safe food or the ability to acquire acceptable foods in a socially acceptable way is limited or uncertain (11). This means that food need is experienced when there is uncertainty about future food availability and access; insufficiency in the amount and kind of food required for a healthy lifestyle; or need to use socially unacceptable ways to acquire food (12). This uncertainty results in worry and anxiety; feelings of alienation and deprivation; hunger and malnutrition; distress and adverse changes in social interactions of family members (13). The need for food necessitated the urgency of strategies that can be used to solve this problem.

Strategies for meeting food needs of families play a crucial role in the overall development of family members. These strategies are activities, which ensure that sufficient and adequate foods are available to family members at all times (14). Women play a key role in using these strategies to meet the food needs of the family and society at large (15). This is because, women are more likely than men to use available resources and skills to further improve the welfare of the family members (3; 16; 17). Women's activities in support of their families determine how much food that is available for consumption and hence the nutritional status of the household members (18; 19). Women especially housewives tend to be responsible for producing, processing and preserving food for their household.

A housewife is a married woman whose main occupation is caring for her family, managing household affairs and doing housework. The adequacy of care given to family members is determined by the mothers' control of economic resources, autonomy in decision making and physical and mental status (17). Maxwell and Frankenberger, reported that women has been found to control their family

nutrition status through food preparation, processing of food products and through daily determining of quality and quantity of food to be provided (9). Yet, women are often disproportionately affected by hunger and poverty, largely as a result of gender inequality and their lack of enjoyment of social, economic, civil and political rights and power (15). They are disadvantaged in inheritance and ownership of land and other property, as well as in access to credits, natural resources, technology, vocational education and training, information and extension services because of discrimination (20).

Globally, according to FAO, more than one billion people are undernourished and over two billion suffer from lack of essential vitamins and minerals in their food. Nearly six million children die every year from malnutrition or related diseases, that is about half of all preventable deaths. In addition, developing countries account for 98% of the World's undernourished individuals, and a third of these persons reside in sub-Saharan Africa alone (21). In Sub-Saharan Africa, poor access to food emanates largely from a web of factors including poverty, livelihood losses, escalation of food prices, political instability and policy gaps (22). A large portion of the population suffers from various forms of malnutrition as consequences of inadequate food intake both in quality and quantity. This not only causes individual suffering and hardship but also places an enormous strain on the country's economy (4). Nutritional deficiencies are not always due to poverty, many cultural practices; the nation's economic condition; nutritional knowledge; behaviour; eating habit; and poor sanitation and hygienic practices also contribute to these deficiencies especially among the vulnerable family members – children, pregnant and lactating woman and the elderly (5). The majority of those suffering from hunger and malnutrition are victims of long-term, chronic lack of access to adequate food or incompetency in meeting the food needs of families (2). Most of them are small land holders or landless people, mostly women and children living in rural areas such as Edem community without access to productive resources. This study therefore determined the strategies employed by housewives in meeting food needs of family members in Edem community, Nsukka L.G.A, Enugu State. Specifically, the study identified; the strategies housewives employ in meeting the food needs of their family members; the economic factors affecting the availability of food

items in the family; the factors that affect food needs of families; the major meals consumed by families in Edem community; and how the level of nutritional competence of housewives is utilised in meeting the food needs of family members

Materials and methods

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. According to Adi, descriptive survey is a research method that describes the characteristics of the population or phenomenon that is being studied (23).

The area of the study is Edem in Nsukka Local Government Area, Enugu State. Edem comprises 3 autonomous communities namely: Akpa-Edem (made up of 12 villages), Ozi-Edem (made up of 13 villages) and Edem-Ani (made up of 13 villages). The population of Edem is 309,633 based on the 2006 Census. Christianity is the major religion of Edem indigenes and agriculture is the main economic activity. Edem community was considered because it is a rural area where studies on strategies for meeting food needs have not been conducted.

The population of the study comprised of 3,257 housewives in Edem community, Nsukka L.G.A. This is a population estimate based on the 2006 census according to National Population Commission, Nsukka Chapter (24).

Sampling was done in multiple stages. Firstly, two villages were picked from each of the three communities (a total of six villages) using systematic random sampling. Slovin's formula for calculating sample size
$$X = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$
 was used to obtain the sample size of 107. This sample size was equally distributed among the villages; 18 women were selected from five villages while 17 women were selected from one village using simple random sampling without replacement. Finally, the questionnaires were administered to the housewives who were available and gave their consent during the time of the study.

The instrument for data collection was structured questionnaire designed by the researchers after extensive literature review. The questionnaire was made up of sections A-F. Section A sought to obtain personal data of the respondents. Section B – strategies used by housewives in meeting food needs of families. Section C – economic factors that affect availability of foods in the family. Section D – factors that affect the food needs of families.

Section E – major meals consumed by people in Edem community. Section F – how nutritional knowledge helps housewives in meeting food needs of families. The instrument was face validated by three experts in the department of Home Economics and Hospitality Management Education. To test the consistency with which the instrument tests what it is designed to test, the questionnaire was distributed to 30 women in Orba community, Udenu L.G.A. A reliability coefficient of 0.82 was obtained for the instrument using Cronbach's Alpha measure of internal consistency.

The researchers administered the instrument to the respondents with the help of

two research assistants. The questionnaire was interpreted for those who could not understand it. Number of questionnaires distributed were 107, but due to insufficient information, seven were discarded. Therefore, the information contained in the 100 completely filled questionnaires were analysed.

Data collected were coded into Statistical Package and Service Solution (SPSS) version 21 for analysis. Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to analyse the data collected. Items with means of 2.5 and above were regarded as agreed while items with means below 2.5 were regarded as disagreed.

Results

Table 1: Strategies housewives employ in meeting the food needs of their family members

S/N	Strategies	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Cultivating home gardens	3.34	0.913	Agreed
2	Budgeting family income	3.37	0.837	Agreed
3	Buying food in season	3.47	0.643	Agreed
4	Proper preservation of food item	3.21	0.913	Agreed
5	Sales of farm produce	3.42	0.727	Agreed
6	Proper processing of food items	3.33	0.620	Agreed
7	Multiple sources of income	3.73	0.529	Agreed
8	Bulk Purchase	3.17	0.593	Agreed

SD = Standard Deviation

Table 1 shows the strategies used by housewives in meeting food needs of families. The respondents agreed to all the strategies. They include having other sources of income, buying food in season, sales of farm produce, cultivating home gardens, bulk purchase, proper preservation of food items and budgeting among others.

Table 2: Economic Factors that Affect the Availability of Food Items in the Family

S/N	Factors	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Inflation that leads to low food supply	3.27	0.874	Agreed
2	Inflation leads to expensiveness of food items	3.47	0.758	Agreed
3	Low income level of the family	3.30	0.674	Agreed
4	Harsh weather and climate conditions that leads to low supply of food	3.35	0.809	Agreed
5	Inflation which leads to scarcity of some food items	3.45	0.642	Agreed
6	Deflation which leads to bulk purchasing of food items	3.29	0.743	Agreed

SD = Standard Deviation

The economic factors that affect the availability of food items in the families are presented in Table 2. The respondents agreed that all the listed items were economic factors. The factors include inflation, low family income, harsh weather and climate conditions and deflation.

Table 3: Factors that affect the food needs of family members

S/N	Factors	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Finance	3.50	0.810	Agreed
2	Preference	3.40	0.711	Agreed
3	Literacy	2.88	1.085	Agreed
4	Food in season	3.58	0.638	Agreed
5	Food insecurity	3.35	0.845	Agreed

SD = Standard Deviation

The factors that affect the food needs of family members are presented in Table 3. The factors include finance, food in season, food insecurity, preference and literacy.

Table 4: Major Meals Consumed by Families in Edem community

S/N	Items	Mean	S.D	Decision
1	Steamed bambara groundnut pudding (Okpa)	3.92	0.273	Agreed
2	Yam and pigeon pea pottage (Ayaraya Ji)	3.84	0.368	Agreed
3	Cocoyam and pigeon pea pottage (Achicha Ede)	3.90	0.302	Agreed
4	Steamed maize with cowpea meal (Ayaraya oka)	3.88	0.327	Agreed
5	Jollof rice/Rice and stew	3.27	0.679	Agreed
6	Maize pudding (Igbangwu)	3.16	0.917	Agreed
7	Garri with soup	3.48	0.577	Agreed
8	Yam and vegetable pottage	3.19	0.706	Agreed
9	Bean pottage/beans and stew	3.09	0.653	Agreed
10	Cassava fufu (Akpu) with soup	3.78	0.505	Agreed
11	Pap	3.63	0.485	Agreed

SD = Standard Deviation

Table 4 shows the major foods consumed by families in Edem community. Some of them are okpa, ayaraya ji, achicha ede, ayaraya oka, igbangwu, rice, beans among others.

Table 5: Ways the Level of Nutritional Knowledge of Housewives is Utilised in Meeting the Food Needs of Family Members

S/N	Variables	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Nutritional knowledge helps her to make wise budgeting	3.35	0.730	Agreed
2	It helps her to provide the appropriate food for different family members e.g., pregnant women	3.49	0.577	Agreed
3	It provides her with skills needed for food preparation	3.15	0.914	Agreed
4	Nutritional competence helps her with the knowledge of food in season	3.18	0.903	Agreed

SD = Standard Deviation

Ways the level of nutritional knowledge of housewives help in meeting the food needs of families in Edem community are presented in Table 5. All the listed variable were regarded as agreed since their means are above 2.5.

Discussion

The satisfaction of food needs of family members will be achieved if safe, acceptable and adequate food in the right quantity and quality is available, accessible and satisfactorily used by all individuals at all times to live a healthy and active life. Findings of this study showed that some of the strategies adopted by housewives include home gardening, budgeting, buying foods in season, proper food preservation, sale of farm produce and having other sources of income. Similarly, a study by Khatri-Chetri and Maharjan showed that some coping strategies for meeting food needs include collection of wild foods, seasonal migration to the places outside the district or country, sale of agriculture and livestock products, use of savings and loan for food (25). Home gardens which are mostly managed by women, provide family with various nutrient food products (25). Chambers and Momsen found that the home gardens are frequently a source of great diversity of foods (26). These gardens contribute to meeting food needs at household level, to diversify food consumption and to enhance nutritional wellbeing of household members (27). Post-harvest activities refer to the processing and preservation of agricultural, animal, forest and wild food products. Processing of raw products lead to a general improvement in the shelf life, texture, taste, aroma as well as nutritional value (28). Furthermore, crop processing may enable households to obtain higher returns from agriculture, and in this sense, they may have a positive impact on reduction of malnutrition and poverty (28).

Findings also indicated the economic factors that affect the availability of foods in the family, some of which are inflation, low income level, harsh weather and deflation. Similarly, Adebayo, reported that food supply and demand imbalance, crude agricultural technology, poor growth rate of family income, preference for foreign products and high food prices are some of the factors that hinder food security (29). Findings also showed that finance, preference, literacy, food in season and food insecurity, are the factors that affect the food needs of families. Supporting this, Riley, et.al reported that seasonal foods and scarcity of food among other things are some of the factors that affects the food needs of family members (10).

An adequate diet is one that contains all the necessary requirements of food sources when consumed at the right time and in the right proportion (10). Common meals consumed in the

study area that were identified include steamed Bambara groundnut pudding, yam and pigeon pea pottage, cocoyam and pigeon pea pottage, steamed maize with cowpea meal, jollof rice/Rice and stew, maize pudding, garri/cassava fufu with soup, yam and vegetable pottage, bean pottage/beans and stew among others. A study by Okeke, et.al identified Bambara fufu, cassava fufu, African yam bean, Bambara pudding among other meals, as meals rich in macro-nutrients, micro-nutrients and phytochemicals (30).

Result also indicated how the level of nutritional knowledge of housewives help in meeting the food needs of families as follows. It helps her to make wise budgeting, provide the appropriate food for different family members e.g. pregnant women and it provides her with skills in food preparation. Supporting this, a study by Onyeneke, et.al showed that mothers' nutrition knowledge and households' closeness to market improved preschool children dietary diversity (31). Also, Eze, et.al reported that people's awareness of nutritive value of foods help them adopt good eating habits that cumulated to nutritional well-being (32).

Conclusion

This study shows that housewives in Edem community meet the food needs of their families through various strategies such as home gardening, budgeting, bulk purchase, proper food preservation, sale of farm produce and having other sources of income. Inflation, low income level, harsh weather and climate condition, deflation, food preference, food in season and food insecurity were some of the factors that affected food availability and food needs of families in Edem community. Common meals consumed by families in Edem community were steamed bambara groundnut pudding, yam and pigeon pea pottage, steamed maize with cowpea meal, maize pudding, yam and vegetable pottage, bean pottage, among others. Finally, findings of this study showed that nutritional knowledge of housewives helped them to make wise budgeting, and provided them with food preparation skills.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendation were made.

1. The identified strategies should be fully imbibed by the housewives as this will go a long way in improving the nutritional

- status of family members.
2. Homemakers should adopt the preparation of the identified meals as research have confirmed the rich nutrient content in each of them
 3. Mothers and caregivers should strive for proper nutritional knowledge as this will help them in maintaining a favourable nutritional status of family members.
 4. Government should enact policies that will ensure that food items are available and affordable to everyone at all times.

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