

Maternal Social Support And Underweight Status Of Under-5 Children In Rivers State

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ABSTRACT

Malnutrition among children still remains a debilitating public health problem. Mothers abilities and capabilities are factors that influence the nutritional status of children globally. This study was therefore designed to examine the association between maternal social support and underweight status of under-5 children in Rivers state. A cross-sectional survey involving a multi-stage stratified random sampling method was deployed in this study to select 316 mother-child pair. Information on maternal social support and encouragement, anthropometric parameters of the children were collected and analysed using descriptive and regression analysis. The WHO Anthro software was used to obtain the Weight-for-Age Z scores. The results showed that 15.6% and 6.1% of the mothers had tertiary education, 7% and 12% of the mothers reported no social support from anyone in upland and riverine respectively. It was also observed that riverine mothers who had social support AOR 2.7 (CI: 1.2 - 3.7) had lower risks of having underweight children. In conclusion, maternal social support is a maternal factor that can influence underweight among under-five children in Rivers state. The study then recommends that mother should endeavour to utilise social support available to them.

Keywords: maternal social support, underweight, under-5.

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I. Introduction

Malnutrition still remains a debilitating public health problem (Tesfaw and Fenta, 2021). The case is not different in Nigeria despite efforts to eradicate this menace (Goson, et al. 2022). Nutritional status in childhood has been recognized as a pointer to nutritional profile of the entire community and one of the transcribers of child health and survival (Mittal, Singh and Ahluwalia, 2007). Mothers abilities and capabilities are factors that influence the nutritional status of children globally. This study was therefore designed to examine the association between maternal social support and underweight status of under-5 children in Rivers state.

According to Dhungana (2013) Children's nutritional status is crucial because it affects their health, physical development, academic achievement, and future success. Weight-for-age is one of the indices used by WHO to assess nutritional status of under-5 children (WHO, 2022). A unique window of opportunity exists during the first 1,000 days of a child's life to stop undernutrition and its effects (UNICEF, 2022). It is important to adequately take care of the child during this period. Maternal empowerment has been acknowledged as a good influencer of overall child health. Glewwe, (1999) added that higher maternal empowerment status could influence the quality of living stability of mothers because they would be able to marry husband with better economic status and consequently show support and encourage the women to adopt appropriate childcare practice. This naturally would sustain the adoption of good care practices. In addition, maternal support services have been identified to strengthen mother's confidence in the area of childcare which enables them adopt good childcare practices and in turn, translates to better nutrition outcomes in children (Mistry et al. 2019). Most women in the 21st century have the responsibility of managing their career, home and their lives. Sometimes these responsibilities come with a lot of obligations and demands making them to become burnt out without even realising it in some cases. This burn out scenario may mar their abilities to show appropriate and responsive care to their families. Thus, a little bit of encouragement and positive words can go a long way to mitigate this problem. Social support plays a buffering role from stressful life events and is associated with positive feeding behaviours during pregnancy and post-partum periods (Dibaba, Fantahun and Hindin, 2013; Matare et al., 2020 and Bosire et al., 2016). It reassures individuals and makes them hopeful especially mothers.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A cross-sectional survey involving a multi-stage stratified random sampling method was deployed in this study to select 316 mother-child pair. This study was conducted in selected Local government areas in Rivers State, Nigeria. Mothers who gave consent and had children between the ages of 6-59 months were included in the study. While mothers who did not give consent and could not verbally communicate were excluded from the study. A pretested semi-structured interviewer-administered questionnaire was used to collect information on maternal social support and encouragement, anthropometric parameters of the children were collected and analysed using descriptive and regression analysis. Maternal social support score was obtained from five items. The WHO Anthro software was used to obtain the Weight-for-Age Z scores.

III. RESULTS

The maternal education level and social support status was displayed in table 1. It shows that more mothers in the upland area (15.6%) had tertiary education than mothers in the riverine area (6.1%) and maternal social support did not differ significantly in the upland and riverine areas of Rivers state but more mothers in the upland (92.7%) had social support from at least someone. Table 2 illustrates the association between maternal social support and underweight in U-5 children. It was also observed that riverine mothers who had social support AOR 2.7 (CI: 1.2 - 3.7) had lower risks of having underweight children

Table 1: Maternal Education Level and Social Support Status

Variables	Upland n(%)	Riverine n(%)	X ²	p-value
Educational level				
No formal	2(0.92)	3(3.06)	6.55	.048
Primary	28(12.84)	19(19.39)		
Secondary	154(70.64)	70(71.43)		
Tertiary	34(15.60)	7(6.12)		
Total	218(100)	98(100)		
Social Support				
Had Social Support	202(92.66)	86(87.76)	2.91	.573
No Social Support	16(7.34)	12(12.24)		
Total	218(100)	98(100)		

Table 2: Association between maternal social support and underweight in U-5 children

Strata	Variables	B	Std. Error	Df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% CI for Exp(B)	
							LB	UB
Upland	Social support							
	Had SS	-.316	.573	1	.581	.729	.237	2.241
	No SS	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref
Riverine	Social support							
	Had SS	-.545	.570	1	.000	2.732	1.891	3.740
	No SS	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref	Ref

Note: SS = Social Support, LB = Lower bound, UB = Upper bound

IV. DISCUSSION

More mothers in the upland area had tertiary education, as well as social support than mothers in the riverine area. It was also observed that riverine mothers who had social support AOR 2.7 (CI: 1.2 - 3.7) had lower risks of having underweight children thus, supporting the position of the study by Mistry et al. (2019). Social support and encouragement can positively boost mothers' confidence and as well cover up their lapses in the area of childcare. This may consistently lead to an improvement in the nutritional well-being of their children and the entire populace. This finding aligns with that of Lee and Lupo (2013) who stated that childcare support and social support mitigate against childcare problems. Warren, (2005) added that social and appraisal support improve maternal confidence in childcare which enables them adopt good childcare practices. Similarly, Taylor et al., (2015) added that childcare support facilitates positive parenting behaviours. The level of social support shown to women by significant others in the study area must be increased in order to improve the women's ability to adequately play their nurturing roles and provide a healthy and stimulating environment for adequate growth (Wemakor, 2022). This recognises the importance of social support from the significant other. This position agrees with the findings of this study.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, giving social support and encouragement to mothers with under-5 children can assist to buffer daily stress and in turn reduce the burden of underweight in children in Rivers state. Therefore, efforts to curb underweight in children should also include encouraging social support for mothers.

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