

***Full Length Research***

# **Challenges and Information Seeking Behaviors of Cancer Patients: A Qualitative Case Study of Cancer Patients in Lere Local Government Area of Kaduna State, Nigeria**

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**Cancer is one of the delicate diseases that require extra careful attention to individuals who were diagnosed with its complications. As such this study aims at finding out the challenges and sources of information consulted by cancer patients in Lere local government area of Kaduna state, Nigeria. In order to achieve this unique objective, qualitative research methodology was adopted and interviewed five (5) participants. Findings of this study revealed that insufficient fund, inadequate cancer specialist and poor family support were the challenges faced by cancer patients in this case study. Furthermore, co-cancer patients, religious leaders, and residents' neighbors were the sources of information consulted by cancer patients in Lere local government area of Kaduna state, Nigeria Metropolis. Finally, the researchers proposed some recommendations for practical intervention.**

**Keywords:**Challenges, information seeking behavior, Cancer Patients, Health related information, qualitative case study, thematic analysis.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Cancer is one of the deadly diseases that accommodate a subject of concern in the field of medical profession and societal development. Even though cancer is a deadly disease, there are possible signs which an individual needs to be familiar with such as lump, abnormal bleeding, prolonged cough, unexplained weight loss and a change in bowel movements. National

Health Service (2018) claimed that over 90.5 million people are diagnosed with cancer complications, while about 8.8 million cancer patients reported death around the globe (World Health Organization, 2018). Moreover, there are cases of cancer complications in Africa. For example, in Nigeria about 80,000 Nigerians lost their precious lives as a result of cancer complications

annually (W.H.O., 2018).

In order to address the issue of cancer complications, several scholars approached the problem from different perspectives. For instance, the study of Arora N., Johnson P., Gustafson DH., McTavish F., Hawkins RP. & Pingree S. (2002) identified the barriers to information access among cancer patients. While, Ashing & Lim (2004) identified and discussed the emotional outcome of cancer patients. On the other hand, Deering (1996) identified the health information demands and delivery for cancer patients. While, Luker KA., Beaver K., Leinster SJ.&Owens RG (1996) identified the information needs and sources of information for women with breast cancer.

Even though these studies have helped for better understanding of cancer approaches, to the best of our knowledge at the time of conducting this study there is no one single empirical study that view cancer complications from the perspective of the challenges and sources of information cancer patients consults specifically in Lere local government area of Kaduna state, Nigeria.

### What is known?

Scholars from different profession have discussed the concept of cancer, types of cancer, signs of cancer, causes of cancer, effects of cancer, information needs of cancer patients and cancer medications.

### What is Unknown?

In this study, the researchers confirmed that at the time of conducting this study there is no one single empirical study that identified and discussed the challenges and sources of information cancer patients consulted in Lere local government area of Kaduna state, Nigeria.

## METHOD

In order to collect relevant data for this study, qualitative case study approach was adopted and design semi-structured interview for cancer participants. Qualitative case study is an excellent approach for clear understanding of individuals' inner-pains and real-life experiences (Cohen D. &Crabtree B., 2006).

### Procedure

Relevant data for this study was collected through face to face interview with cancer patients in Lere local government area of Kaduna state. Initially, before the commencement of the interview the researchers seek the participants' consent and explained to them in details about the study aims and objectives. The interview was conducted at various participants' choice of locations within Lere metropolis. Questions were asked about the challenges they face with regards to cancer

complications and the sources of information they consulted in order to overcome the challenges.

## Analysis

All data collected in this study was analyzed based on thematic analysis phases. Thematic analysis is a qualitative analytical method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns, themes, phrases and key words in minimally organized and describable data in rich and detail. (Braun V. & Clarke V., 2006).

**Phase 1:** The entire voice recorded interview was transcribed into written document while later, the researchers carefully read and re-read the data more than five times with the help of highlighter pen in order to search for themes or phrases which directly answered the research questions.

**Phase 2:** Open codes (themes or phrases which directly answered the research questions) were identified from the participants narratives.

**Phase 3:** Open codes were condensed together and formed sub-categories.

**Phase 4:** Sub- categories based on a particular research question were grouped together (related sub-categories) and formed several themes.

## Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations in research refer to a designated policy protecting the reputation of participants under investigation. For the purpose of this study, the researchers explained the study purpose, objectives and the whole research process to the participants before obtaining their consent to participate. Moreover, the researchers assured the participants that should anyone of them wants to discontinue during the course of the research he/she will be free to do so. Confidentiality and anonymity was censured by protecting the privacy of the research participants for not exposing their names at any stage in this research.

## RESULTS

The raw data collected and analyzed from the interview conducted with five cancer patients in Lere local government area of Kaduna state with regards to the challenges they are facing and which source of information they consult in order to overcome the challenge emerged the following themes as described below.

The table1 represents the challenges facing cancer patients in Lere local government area of Kaduna state.

**Table 1.**Challenges Facing Cancer Patients in Lere Local Government Area of Kaduna State, Nigeria

| Investigation  | Themes                       |
|--|------------------------------|
| What challenges are facing cancer patients in Lere local government area of Kaduna state, Nigeria? | Poor family Support          |
|  | Inadequate cancer specialist |
|  | Insufficient fund            |

**Table 2.**Sources of Cancer Information Consulted By Cancer Patients in Lere Local Government of Kaduna State

| Investigation   | Themes             |
|---|--------------------|
| What sources of information do cancer patients in Lere local government of Kaduna state consult to overcome their challenges? | Cancer patients    |
|   | Resident Neighbors |
|   | Religious leaders  |

The table1 consist three (3) themes which were explained below.

### Poor family support

Poor family support was one of the challenges facing cancer patients in Lere local government area of Kaduna state. For example in the words of participant he narrated how difficult he usually found himself as a cancer patient due to absent of family members' supports when he stated that:

*"Ah, you (the interviewer) see most of the time at night I found it very difficult to go the toilet, I usually spoil my cloth. This happen to me because my family members don't care about my wellbeing ever since I was diagnosed with cancer (paused for a while and share tears)"*

Similar complain was reported by another participant when he stated that:

*"Am, sir my major challenge with is this disease (cancer) is that I have no designated and assigned individual from my family that would be staying with me at home and also who will be escorting me to the hospital for medical checkup"*

### Inadequate cancer specialists

Another challenges claimed by cancer patients in this case study was inadequate cancer specialists in their community. This claim was evident in the confession of one participant when he stated that:

*"Well, as you can see in our village we lack specialist that will attend to our cancer complications so am really suffering when am in*

*pain. We have to travel from Lere to A.B.U Teaching hospital in Shika Zaria and seriously is not easy at all."*

Contrary to the above narration another participant stated how trusted he usually became when he stated that:

*"Eh! One of my problems with this cancer disease is that we don't have enough professionals that specialized with cancer diseases. So whenever I go to our local hospital they refer me to big hospital in the city and sometimes I don't even have enough money to buy three square meals talk less of travelling expenses."*

### Insufficient fund

The most prominent challenges of cancer patients in Lere local government area at the time of conducting this study is insufficient fund. This claim can be trace in the narration of one cancer patient when he stated that:

*"Ah, you (the interviewer) see we are living in a small village and my occupation is farming and am just a small scale farmer. I don't have much money to cover up my medical expenses that is why some times I prepare to buy traditional medicine."*

Another participant with different perception stated that:

*"uhm! You know the economic hardship we are facing now presently in our country. So I found it very difficult to have money to buy even traditional medicine."*

Table 2 represents the voices of cancer patients with

regards to sources of information they consult that may help them overcome their everyday life challenges, which consists the following elaborated themes:

### **Cancer patients**

One of the sources cancer patients in Lere local government area of Kaduna state consults was their prior experienced co-cancer patients at their disposal. For example in the word of one participant he claimed that:

*“uhm. When I have new experience about this diseases (cancer) I normally call my people that are diagnosed with this cancer disease and ask them about some advices or information that may help me overcome the overwhelming challenge.”*

Another patient narrated how convenient he became when consulting his cancer patients with regards to any challenge he encounter when he stated that:

*“Ah! My major source of information is noting rather than my partners in crime, am talking about cancer patients because I believe they will have best information that would assist me to overcome any challenge I faced.”*

### **Resident Neighbors**

Cancer patients claimed that they also consult their neighbors with regards to any advice or information that may help them. For example one participant stated that:

*“Well, like I told you earlier no one is taking care of me among my family members. So I normally ask my neighbors for help in terms of mobility and any other little they can offer for me to go to the hospital.”*

Another participant shared his point of view about his neighbors as a source of information when he stated that:

*“Ah, sometimes I ask my neighbors to lend me money in or any information about any one that can assist me with money. So the information they gave me usually helps.”*

### **Religious leaders**

One unique findings of this study is how one of the cancer patients in Lere local government area of Kaduna state consulted a respected religious leader in their community when he stated that:

*“Ah, there was a time I told one Imam (Islamic leader) in our mosque to help me talk to my family members about my conditions, and believe me his intervention really helps because now some of them are really helping me in one way or the other.”*

### **Data discussion**

The findings of this study were discussed below:

1. This study found that poor family support has negative impact to cancer patients. Poor family support in African culture to any kind of disease usually leads to desperations, anxiety and loss of hope from health quick recovery. Moreover, inadequate cancer specialists was another challenges faced by cancer patients in this case study. Inadequate specialists to a particular disease in every human community is a very set back to health systems that may leads to health complications such as wrong diagnosis and sudden death. Furthermore, insufficient fund has been reported as one of the challenges facing cancer patients in this study. Insufficient fund to cover medical bills has negative consequences to patients' physical and mental stabilities.

Contrary to above findings, the study conducted by Bingham A, Bishop A, Coffey P, Winkler J, Bradley J, Dzuba I & Agurto I. (2003) found out that ineffective infrastructure as well as long distance between facilities and clients' homes increase transportation costs and delay reporting results as challenges facing cancer patients in low-resource settings.

2 Co-cancer patients in this study were mentioned as one of the sources of information consulted by cancer patients in Lere local government area of Kaduna state. This indicates a good reasonable trust and respect to co-cancer patients because there are positive beliefs and comforts whenever individuals ask people who share the same social boundaries and common interest about a particular issue (challenges of cancer disease). However, Resident Neighbors were also sources of information cancer patients consulted in this study. This is not supersizing because in a typical Hausa community like Lere, people view their residents' neighbors as brothers' keepers that is why cancer patients in this case study consulted their resident neighbors to source for information that may help them to overcome their challenges. Meanwhile, Religious leaders were also reported as source of information in this study. Religious leaders are highly respectable personalities that have the privilege of dictating their followers' everyday life style including relationship with family members. Religious leaders in Lere local government area of Kaduna state are regards to semi-Gods that is why whatever decision

they made it remains valid and no one would double cross their decision making. This unique personality they possess made them a good source of any kind of information (including cancer information).

Opposite of the above findings, the study accomplished by Kaplan C.P., Anna N., Sharon D., Monica L., Rena L., Toman J.L & Eliseo J. (2016) found that physicians, nurses, family/friends, printed materials and internet were the sources of cancer information consulted by Spanish-speakers in California.

## CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that cancer patients in Lere government area of Kaduna state experienced some challenges in their everyday life activities which include poor family supports, inadequate cancer specialist and insufficient fund. Moreover, the study found out that those cancer patients in this case study consult only their resident neighbors, religious leaders and co-cancer patients as sources of information to overcome their possible challenges. Therefore, the researchers made the followings recommendations for implementation.

1. There is a critical need for government officials and stakeholders of Lere government area of Kaduna state to be frequently organizing sensitization programs that would be capturing the challenges of cancer patients and how they can overcome the challenges effectively.
2. Informational programs should be organize by health workers and communicate it to cancer patients in Lere government area of Kaduna state in order to create more awareness on how to cope with any everyday life experiences cancer patients may encounter.

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## Declaration of conflicting interests

We declare that there is no any conflict of interest between the researchers and the cancer patients in this study.

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