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Conference of the Paediatric Association of Nigeria, fifty years post inception: Feedback from conference attendees

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Abstract: *Introduction and Objectives:* The Annual General Meeting and Scientific Conference of the Paediatrics Association of Nigeria has been a yearly event holding in different cities in Nigeria in the past 50 years. It is the largest gathering of child health care workers in the country and plays a major role in information dissemination as well as advocacy for the Nigerian child. This study set out to assess the perception of the conference attendees concerning key aspects of the conference.

Methods: A cross-sectional descriptive study was done on participants attending the 50th anniversary of the Paediatric Association of Nigeria Conference in Ibadan, Nigeria. A self-administered, semi-structured questionnaire designed by the authors was used to obtain socio-demographic and conference perception data. The data was analysed using SPSS version 20.

Results: There were 133 respondents, 92 (69.2%) females and 41 (30.8%) males. 42.9% of respondents were Consultants. The study participants cut across the 6 geopolitical zones of Nigeria. Most, 92(69.2%) of the participants had attended the conference up to 3 times. The common reasons given

for attending the conference were career growth(53.4%) and information gathering (27.1%). 106 (79.7%) of the participants reported that the oral abstract presentations were their most preferred aspect of the conference. 52 (39.1%) of the participants were satisfied with all aspects of the conference while 6(4.5%) of the participants felt the accommodation arrangements for the conference should be improved upon. Suggestions made by participants of areas to be included in the schedule of activities during the conference included city touring, aerobics/sports and mentoring activities. While 51(38.3%) of the participants were unable to select the best of the paediatric conferences they have attended, 26 (19.5%) affirmed that the PAN conference in Abuja 2018 was their best.

Conclusion: Career growth and the academic aspects of the Paediatric Association of Nigeria Conference are major attractions for conference attendance. The social and supporting aspects of the conference should be improved to boost attendees' overall satisfaction.

Keywords: Paediatric Association of Nigeria, Conference, feedback, participants

Introduction

Professional groups often require an organized forum during which matters affecting them as a group are discussed and vital information disseminated.¹ This need has resulted in the planning of conferences periodically at specific locations where members can readily access and afford to attend.² A conference is simply a meeting of people to discuss a common topic.³ Moreso, an academic conference describes a formal event where researchers present the result of quality research, participate in workshops and other career-oriented activities.³

In a professional conference, professionals meet to address related matters or developments.³ The information, values and knowledge shared at conference meetings has made it a vital aspect of academic life.¹ In the precise words of Edelheim *et al*,⁴

“Each and every time we attend a conference, we are simultaneously constructing our own identities as academics: the things we do, the sessions we attend, the questions we ask (and refrain from asking), the connections we develop, and the ensuing research we work on are all part of making us into the selves that we experience, and others see.”

The annual scientific Conference of the Paediatric Association of Nigeria (PANConf) was first held in 1969, precisely a year after the establishment of the association.⁵ This became pertinent to aid in the realisation of the objectives of the association which are - to actively seek the well-being of children and ensure that their right to quality health care is protected, to promote and advance the practice and study of paediatrics and child health, to encourage research and dissemination of knowledge in all aspects of paediatrics and child health, to safeguard the interest of all workers in the field of paediatrics and child health and to foster friendship and co-operation among workers in the field of paediatrics and child health and allied disciplines.⁵

The Conference gathers medical doctors, nurses and allied health care workers who are specialists in the care of children in January each year for the past 50 years (1969 – 2019) in different cities in Nigeria.⁵ Over the years the membership and impact of the conference has grown exponentially towards the achievement of its vision of a world where every child is born with an equitable and optimal chance to survive, grow and develop and attain maximal potential in life. The perception of conference attendees towards a conference is evident in the numbers of individuals attend and in their level of participation in the events of the conference. It also has a role to play in the eventual success of the event. Being a landmark celebration, it also is a good time to look back and take stock of the activities of the previous years, to guide strategic planning of future conference meetings. This study set out to assess the perception of the conference attendees concerning key aspects of the conference.

Methodology

This study was a cross-sectional survey. The study included paediatricians and trainee paediatricians (junior registrars and senior registrars) who attended the 50th conference of the Paediatric Association of Nigeria (PANConf, 2019) in Ibadan, Nigeria. The PANConf is the largest gathering of paediatricians and allied health-care workers involved or interested in child health in Nigeria.⁵ This Annual General and Scientific Conference takes place in January at different locations in the country and serves as an avenue for deliberations, promotion of knowledge and exchange of information affecting the child health specialists and on the health of the Nigerian-child.⁵ It is organized by the Paediatric Association of Nigeria (PAN). The country, Nigeria, has 36 states which are grouped into six geopolitical zones as follows; North East (Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, Yobe), North Central (Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau and Federal Capital Territory), North West (Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Zamfara), Southeast (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo), South-South (Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Rivers, Delta, Edo), South-

west (Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo).

The study tool was pretested among 20 paediatricians and paediatric nurses who attended a clinical meeting at the Department of Paediatrics, Rivers State University Teaching Hospital.

Ambiguous questions were rephrased. The questionnaire consisted of both close and open-ended questions to allow respondents to articulate their views.

A systematic sampling technique was used. There were 150 questionnaires distributed to every 3rd participant sitting in a row just before the morning plenary sessions. The self-administered questionnaire was used to derive information on sociodemographics and feedback on conference experiences. Filled out questionnaires were retrieved continuously throughout the three-day duration of the conference. Informed consent was obtained from the study participants and permission to collect the data, granted by the local organizing committee of the conference. Failure to give consent attracted no penalties. The completed questionnaires were collected and screened for completeness. Data analysis was done using SPSS version 20 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, Illinois, USA). Data was presented in simple frequency tables.

Results

A total of 150 questionnaires were distributed and 133 questionnaires were properly filled and retrieved. This gave a response rate of 89%. The age and gender distribution of participants are shown in Table 1. Most of the respondents fell into the 30 to 39 years age bracket (44.4%) and were females (69.2%). There were 57 (42.9%) consultants and 15 (11.3%) nurses, Table 1.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variables	Frequency (n=133)	Percent (%)
<i>Age(years)</i>		
20-29	4	3.0
30-39	59	44.4
40-49	49	36.8
50-59	20	15.0
>70	1	0.8
Mean Age	47.67±0.82	
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	41	30.8
Female	92	69.2
<i>Years of medical practice (post-graduation)</i>		
1-4	15	11.3
5-9	28	21.1
10-14	45	33.8
15-19	27	20.3
20 and above	18	13.5
<i>Designation</i>		
Consultant	57	42.9
Senior Registrar	49	36.8
Registrar	6	4.5
Medical officer	6	4.5
Nurses	15	11.3

Table 2 shows the distribution of respondents across regions of the country. The region most represented was the south-west region (33.1%) while the region least represented was the North-east region (5.3%)

Region of practice	Frequency (n=133)	Percent (%)
South-south	23	17.3
Southeast	19	14.3
South-west	44	33.1
North-central	28	21.0
North-east	7	5.3
North-west	12	9.0

Table 3 shows that 69.2% of the respondents had attended the PANConf one to three times. Most of the respondents (75.2%) sponsored themselves to attend the present conference while about two-thirds of respondents consider the conference registration fee to be too expensive. (Table 3).

Variables	Frequency (n=133)	Percent (%)
Number of PANConfs attended		
1-3	92	69.2
4-6	25	18.8
6-10	11	8.3
10-20	4	3.0
>20	1	0.7
Centre or city of residence or state ever hosted		
Yes	100	75.2
No	33	24.8
Expenditure for PANCOF (naira)		
50,000-100,000	37	27.8
100,000-150,000	54	40.6
150,000-200,000	35	26.3
>200,000	7	5.3
Registration fees expensive		
Yes	80	60.2
No	53	39.8

Table 4 showed that the most interesting events at the conference, in the respondents' opinion were the Oral abstract presentations (79.7%), pre-conference workshops (74.4%) and the symposiums (64.6%) while the annual general meeting was considered most interesting by only 4.5% of respondents. The most common reason given for attending PANConf was for career growth (53.4%) while the least common reason given was for socializing (6.0%), Table 4.

Variables	Frequency (n=133)	Percent (%)
Most interesting event of the Conference *		
Oral Abstract presentations	106	79.7
Pre-conference workshop	99	74.4
Symposium	86	64.6
Poster Abstract Presentations	27	20.3
City Tours	19	14.3
Social Interactions	60	45.1
Cultural/ Dinner nights	28	21.1
Annual General Meeting	6	4.5
Main reason for attending PANCOF *		
Career growth	71	53.4
Information gathering	36	27.1
Socializing	8	6.0
Gain experience	17	12.8

*Multiple responses apply

While 75 (56.4%) respondents reported that they are satisfied with the current state/programmes of the conference the more frequent areas suggested for inclusion or improvement are listed in Table 5.

Areas suggested *	Frequency (n=133)	Percent (%)
Mosque	38	28.6
Crèche	35	26.3
Health screening	28	21.1
Mentoring activities	28	21.1
Sporting activities	25	18.8
More participation of nurses	24	18.0
More workshops	20	15.0
Better publicity	20	15.0
City touring	19	14.3

*Multiple responses apply

Table 6 shows that 38.3% of the participants were unable to select the best PANConf they have attended. Thus, 26(19.5%), 14(10.5%), 12(9.0%), 9(6.8%), 9 (6.8%) of the participants selected Abuja 2018, Port Harcourt 2016, Kaduna2017 and Ilorin 2010 as their best PANConf respectively.

Variables	Frequency (n=133)	Percent (%)
Best PANConf attended*		
Abuja 2018	26	19.5
Kaduna 2017	12	9.0
Port Harcourt 2016	14	10.5
Abakiliki 2015	9	6.8
Calabar 2014	1	.8
Enugu 2013	4	3.0
Ife 2012	1	.8
Abuja 2011	3	2.3
Ilorin 2010	9	6.8
Ibadan 2009	3	2.3
I don't know	51	38.3

*Multiple responses apply

Discussion

The aim of the Annual Conference of the Paediatric Association of Nigeria (PANConf) is to serve as a meeting point for all Paediatricians and associate child-healthcare workers for the promotion of knowledge and exchange of information, to discuss policies and programs that affect children.⁵ The purpose of this research was to assess the perception of the conference attendees concerning key aspects of the conference.

About two-thirds (60.2%) of the respondents considered the registration fees for the PANConf too expensive. Most of the participants in this study spend over one hundred thousand naira to enable them to attend the conference. This is roughly a month salary of a medical officer or house officer, half of a monthly salary of a Registrar and a quarter of a monthly salary of a consultant in most government hospitals in Nigeria. The cadre of medical personnel attending this conference is perhaps a reflection of the affordability of the event. In this present study, more than half of the respondents are consultants. The poor attendance of younger medical personnel involved in childcare to the PANConf is detrimental to the mentorship and the overall growth and impact of the association. It would also negatively impact the capacity development of students and institutions for child health in the country, a major interest of PAN.

The respondents in this present study are more interested in the academic aspects of the conference (abstract presentations, symposiums, and pre-conference workshops) than in the social aspects (city tours, cultural/dinner nights and the annual general meeting). The reason for this may be because gaining new knowledge is a major reason why professionals attend professional conferences such as PANConf.¹ The social aspects though beneficial are generally seen as secondary benefits of conference gatherings.¹ The PANConf, over the years, has showcased high quality of research from all regions of the country. It has also pulled together great analytical minds that make research critique very engaging and rewarding. There is rarely any other event in the country where such stimulating discussions on matters bothering child health in Nigeria takes place. It is during these meetings that members of the association and others are updated on current information and issues nationally and internationally on child health.⁵

The foregoing is also supported by the reasons provided by the respondents concerning why they attend the PANConf. Only a few respondents admitted that they attend the programme for the benefit of socializing. A majority reported attending the conference for reasons of career growth and knowledge gain. Consultant paediatricians often serve a dual role of being hospital consultants in tertiary facilities and University lecturers in the

tertiary institutions to which the hospitals are affiliated. The career progression of a university lecturer is dependent on periodical promotion exercises. Attendance and research abstract presentations at conferences like this form a basis for assessment for promotion. Since more than half of the respondents in this study were consultant paediatricians, this finding is expected. The social aspect of the conference though considered less important by the respondents in this study is one of the objectives for the organization of the annual meeting.⁶ It is meant to serve as an avenue for networking between Nigeria Paediatricians, policymakers, international agencies and other stakeholders in child health towards the achievement of improved care for children. This also encourages networking among those that care for children in the community which impacts positively on referral networks and health care.⁵ Some conference attendees in other climes have further built on relationships that began during conferences using social media connectivity, with very successful collaborations and great academic exploits resulting.^{1,7} Conferences may also serve as a 'get-away' from the monotonous isolated lives of many people in the field of academia.⁷

New areas or events suggested by the participants to be included or improved on in future conference planning included Mosque facilities, a crèche, sporting and mentoring activities. Other respondents suggested that there should be more participation of nurses, more workshops, better publicity of the conference and city touring. While different conference attendees' may have their expectations and needs at a conference, suggestions such as these if acted up will improve the overall satisfaction of the conference participants. It may also ultimately lead to an increase in attendance of the PANConf. Nigeria has two major religions: Christianity and Islam. The Muslims have frequent praying times during which they are expected to separate themselves to pray. Providing a mosque space at the conference venue will eliminate the stress of searching for a convenient and private location to pray. A crèche facility will cater for nursing mothers who had to attend the conference with their young children.

The difficulty in pointing out one PANConf as the best buttresses the fact that the needs and expectations of participants at an academic conference differ widely. The venue of this annual conference of paediatricians and stakeholders in child health in Nigeria rotates around the country. The conferences that were held between 2015 and 2020 were adjudged as best by the respondents. This is likely to be due to the constant improvements made to the quality and content of the conference with each passing year to ensure it achieves the mission of PAN to promote and protect the survival growth and development of every child.

Conclusion

Career growth and the academic aspects of the Paediatric Association of Nigeria Conference are major attractions for conference attendance. The social and supporting aspects of the conference should be improved to boost attendees' overall satisfaction.

A regular appraisal of this yearly event is necessary for constant improvements in all aspects of the Conference

to suit the needs of its participants and to make it comparable with world-class standards.

Recommendations

Conference organisers should take into consideration areas identified by participants for improvement.

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