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SEARCH

Current Volume

Volumes

Articles

Special Collections

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About the Journal

Information for Authors

Copyright Information

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Under-Five Mortality in Nigeria: Perception and Attitudes of the Yorubas Towards the Existence of "Abiku"

Peter Olasupo Ogunjuyigbe

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Abstract

The paper examines the perception and attitudes of the Yorubas about the existence of abiku (children from the spirit world) and the mode of treatment given to such children. The study elicited information from 1695 women of reproductive age in Ondo and Ekiti state of Southwest Nigeria. The study shows (i) more than half of the respondents believe in the existence of abiku children; (ii) that abiku children can be identified from the evidence of past death, frequent indisposition, non-responsiveness of their illness to modern medical care as well as repeated death and verification from traditional healers; (iii) that causes of illness differ between abiku and non-abiku children; (iv) close to 71 percent of the respondents have faith in traditional methods of treatment for abiku children. The study, therefore, reiterates the need to integrate the people's beliefs, attitudes and behavioural practices into health promotion programmes.

Author's affiliation

[Peter Olasupo Ogunjuyigbe](#)

Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

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