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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK



Igniting Child Survival Revolution: A New Era of Hope, Science and Impact

There are moments in history when a single spark ignites a movement; when vision, science and collective will converge to rewrite the future. The 24th NETBRECSIN Meeting was one such moment that signal the dawn of a new era for maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health. From the Editor's Desk, I invite you to journey through the highlights, breakthroughs and bold ideas that are shaping a revolution in child survival.

This year's NETBRECSIN meeting was more than a meeting as it was a wave of innovation and determination, pulsed with a sense of urgency and optimism. It was a crucible of ideas, a rallying point for academics, policymakers and passionate advocates united by a singular mission: to transform the health landscape of Nigeria's most vulnerable. The conversation on the BIRD Lab, a pioneering platform for behavioural science, promises to decode the intricacies of human behaviour and design interventions that resonate deeply with local realities. These are not just academic exercises; they are lifelines for millions of children and mothers.

This edition unveils how science meets action; and Professor Olurotimi Coker's presentation underscored the power of behavioural medicine as the bridge between knowledge and action. His call to harness the EAST model; making health choices Easy, Attractive, Social and Timely which resonated as a roadmap for turning proven solutions into everyday habits. The evidence is clear: when science meets empathy and context, lives are saved and communities thrive.

Next is championing inclusion and rigour as the meeting also confronted the hidden biases that shape health research. Professor Oyedunmi Arulogun's probing question, "Who gets in?" challenges us all to scrutinise the ethical foundations of our studies. She posited that in a country where health disparities run deep and data drives intervention, flawed selection implies missed insights and missed lives. Her message was unmistakable: rigorous and inclusive research is not just good science; it is a moral imperative for effective policy and real-world impact.

This edition also celebrates excellence and shines a spotlight on trailblazers: academics, researchers and public health advocates whose promotions and achievements are redefining excellence in Nigerian academia. Their stories are not merely personal triumphs; they are beacons lighting the path for the next generation of leaders.

As you turn these pages, remember: the revolution in child survival is not a distant dream; it is unfolding now, powered by the relentless spirit of innovation, collaboration and hope. From the Editor's Desk, I urge every reader, whether policymaker, practitioner or passionate citizen and donors to join this movement. Together, we can ensure that every child in Nigeria not only survives but thrives, heralding a future where health and hope walk hand in hand.



24th NETBRECSIN Meeting Delegates

Nigeria's Child Survival Revolution Begins as NETBRECSIN Sparks Wave of Hope

The 24th meeting of the Network on Behavioural Research for Child Survival in Nigeria (NETBRECSIN) kicked off on July 4, 2025. For four days, the venue, Freshland Hotel in Karu, Nasarawa State buzzed with the energy of academics, research students and top government officials, all united by a single mission: to revolutionise maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health in Nigeria.

A surge of optimism and innovation swept through the venue, as the 24th NETBRECSIN meeting unfolded, transforming the venue into a crucible of ideas and action. For four days, the venue buzzed with the energy and passion of academics, research students and top government officials, all united by a single mission: to revolutionise and rewrite the future of maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health in Nigeria.

NETBRECSIN, born from a powerful alliance between the Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, the Federal Ministry (FMHSW) of Information and National Orientation (FMINO), UNICEF and partner universities, is not just a research network, it is a movement. Its vision is bold: to deliver scientific evidence that will shatter old paradigms, strengthen partnerships and drive innovation in every corner of the country. The network's objectives are vital, from providing actionable data

on community knowledge and practices; to fuelling the "One PHC Per Ward" initiative; and supporting the enlistment and analysis of U-Report polls that capture the pulse of the nation.

The opening moments of the meeting were nothing short of inspiring. Prof. A. T. Onajole, the dynamic Chair of NETBRECSIN, set the tone with a rallying call for research to leap off university shelves and ignite real change in communities. He unveiled the upcoming Bird-Lab project, an innovative UNICEF initiative designed to ensure the network's mission not only endures but evolves. He said that, the launch of the Bird-Lab project promises to inject fresh momentum into NETBRECSIN's work, ensuring the network remains at the forefront of child survival efforts in Nigeria. Prof. Onajole's heartfelt plea for candidates to acknowledge NETBRECSIN in their publications underscored the power of collective effort and the importance of recognition in driving progress.

The energy in the room soared as Mr. Henshaw Ogubike, Director of Public Communication and National Orientation at FMINO, described the gathering as "action-packed" and reaffirmed the ministry's unwavering commitment to the cause. He called for relentless research and bold solutions to Nigeria's pressing MNCH challenges, urging participants to share expertise and critique research

with the singular goal of transforming the nation's health landscape.

UNICEF's Chief of Social and Behaviour Change, Kshitij Joshi, added to the momentum, praising the dedication of NETBRECSIN members and promising continued support. He expressed excitement for the Bird-Lab initiative, encouraging the network to amplify its impact and reach even further, beyond the boundaries of UNICEF's direct involvement.

The high point came as Mrs. Helen Akhigbe-Ikechukwu, representing the Dr Binyerem Ukair, Director, Family Health Department, delivered a stirring message of gratitude and resolve. She acknowledged the daunting health indices facing Nigeria's mothers, children, adolescents and elderly, but radiated confidence in the ministry's leadership and NETBRECSIN's vital role in driving progress. Her words were a clarion call for collaboration, innovation and resilience, echoing through the halls and into the hearts of all present.

Throughout the four-day meeting, participants took a deep dive into rigorous discussions, sharing groundbreaking research and charting bold new strategies for behavioural change and health improvement.

NETBRECSIN Ignites New Era for Maternal and Child Health

The 24th meeting of the Network on Behavioural Research for Child Survival in Nigeria (NETBRECSIN) teed-off with a wave of hope, determination and renewed energy. The programme, graced by Mr. Henshaw Ogubike, Director of Public Communication & National Orientation at the Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation (FMINO), brought together leading minds, passionate researchers and dedicated partners, all united by a single mission: to secure a healthier future for Nigeria's children and mothers. This meeting was not just another gathering, it was a movement and a testament to what can be achieved when visionaries unite for a common cause.

Mr. Ogubike, set the stage with a rousing call to action, emphasising that research is the engine of progress. He also applauded the tireless supervisors and mentors whose behind-the-scenes dedication has shaped the success of NETBRECSIN, nurturing the next generation of health leaders and championing the cause of maternal and child health. Their efforts, he noted, "are the backbone of Nigeria's health strategies, ensuring that every child and mother receives the care they deserve".

Mr Ogubike's words resonated with gratitude and challenge as he urged all present to harness the power of continuous research to challenge

outdated norms and to debunk harmful myths that hinder progress. He called for bold ideas, rigorous critique and unwavering commitment, reminding everyone that their expertise and creativity are vital to transforming healthcare delivery across the nation.

He further celebrated the enduring partnership between FMINO, UNICEF, the Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and Nigeria's leading universities; a coalition that has become a beacon of progress for the nation's mothers and youngest citizens. Their collective resolve, he emphasized is the engine driving real, lasting change.

BIRD Lab: Unlocking the Power of Behavioural Science for Child Survival

In a world where nearly 5 million children under five still lose their lives annually to preventable causes, a transformative force is emerging in Nigeria - behavioural science. This force is more than science; it is a movement to secure a healthier, brighter future for every child and mother in Nigeria.

Essentially, this innovative field of behavioural science in the equation of child survival, blending psychology, sociology, medicine and more, is revolutionising how we understand and tackle the root causes of child mortality and maternal health challenges in low- and middle-income countries. It brings to bear, the

transformative role of behavioural science in maternal and child survival health, unlocking the power of behavioural science in lighting the path, Nigeria should thread in order to rewrite the story of child survival; and turn hope into measurable and lasting impact.

At the fore of this movement is the Behavioural Insights Research and Design Laboratory (BIRD Lab), a pioneering initiative dedicated to decoding human behaviour and designing evidence-based interventions that resonate with the realities of communities. Through the BIRD Lab, behavioural science offers a people-centric approach that goes

beyond traditional medical solutions by focusing on the intricate interplay of emotions, social cues, cultural values and environmental contexts.

Ipso facto, behavioural science is behind saving lives and aligns with global goals because behavioural science interventions are critical to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 3.2, which aims to end preventable deaths of newborns and children under five by 2030. Beyond saving lives, these efforts promote human rights, economic development, global health equity and social stability

Coker Unveils Science Behind Saving Children



Participants listening to Professor Olurotimi Coker

Professor Olurotimi Coker, a distinguished expert from Lagos State University College of Medicine, delivered a game-changing paper at the 24th NETBRECSIN Meeting on July 4th, 2025. With a blend of passion and authority, Professor Coker illuminated the critical role of behavioural medicine in transforming child survival rates across Nigeria and beyond.

Professor Coker's presentation, grounded in the latest global research and local realities, highlighted how simple, evidence-based interventions, when delivered with empathy and cultural sensitivity can break through barriers that have long hindered progress. He called for a new era where health education is not just about information but about motivation, social support and making healthy choices easy and attractive for every Nigerian family.

Drawing on decades of interdisciplinary expertise in psychology, psychiatry and behavioural medicine, Professor Coker challenged the audience to rethink the very foundations of healthcare for mothers and children. He argued that the key to saving millions of young lives lies not only in

medical innovation but in understanding the complex web of human behaviour: how people think, decide and act within their unique social and cultural environments.

"Behavioural science," he declared, "is the bridge between knowledge and action. It is the missing link that can turn proven health solutions into everyday habits, from breastfeeding and hand-washing to timely vaccinations and care-seeking for childhood illnesses."

According to Professor Coker, behavioural science reveals that human decisions are not purely rational but are deeply influenced by fast, intuitive thinking (System 1); and slower, deliberate reasoning (System 2). Understanding these cognitive processes allows health programmes to craft interventions that make healthy choices easier, more attractive, socially supported and timely. This is captured succinctly in the EAST model: Easy, Attractive, Social and Timely.

This approach has led to remarkable successes in child health, including: promoting exclusive breastfeeding through peer counselling and mobile campaigns, reducing infant mortality by 13%; improving hygiene practices like hand-washing with soap, cutting diarrheal diseases by up to 50%; increasing vaccination uptake by overcoming hesitancy with SMS reminders and community leader endorsements, boosting coverage from 60% to 85%; and encouraging consistent use of insecticide-treated nets, reducing malaria deaths by 20% in high-risk areas.

Similarly, insights from behavioural science have been used to tackle child

mortality and the power lies in its holistic, integrated approach to behavioural change. This is achieved by tailoring health education to the psycho-social context of communities and leveraging trusted local messengers like grandmothers and spiritual leaders. These interventions, he stressed, address barriers that prevent mothers and caregivers from adopting life-saving practices, such as birth preparedness and clean cord care for newborn health; care-seeking behaviours for pneumonia, diarrhoea and malaria; nutritional practices including complementary feeding and micronutrient supplementation; prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) of HIV; and family planning to space pregnancies and end child marriage have.

As a result, Professor Coker submitted that to sustain and scale these gains; policymakers, health professionals and researchers must embrace behavioural science as a core strategy. This means investing in continuous research, designing context-specific programmes and fostering partnerships across sectors.

The engaging session with leading policymakers, researchers and advocates, resonated with a clear message: achieving the Sustainable Development Goal of ending preventable child deaths by 2030 will require a bold embrace of behavioural science. Professor Coker's vision, as unveiled at this historic meeting, offers a compelling roadmap for Nigeria and the world - a future where every child not only survives but thrives.

Who Gets In?

Arulogun Unpacks Hidden Biases Shaping Health Research



Professor Oyedunmi Arulogun addressing participants

In a country where health disparities run deep and data drives intervention, flawed selection implies missed insights and missed lives. So, NETBRECSIN's forum, known for championing behavioural science in child survival, used the 24th annual meeting as the ideal platform to re-center ethics, inclusion and intentionality in Nigerian research.

Thus, the second panel session for 24th annual meeting of the Network on Behavioural Research for Child Survival in Nigeria (NETBRECSIN), was on "Selection Criteria in Epidemiological Research"; and Professor Oyedunmi Arulogun, the Vice Chancellor of Chrisland University delivered the paper.

With clarity, wit and an urgency that pulsed through the meeting room, she opened with a deceptively simple question: "Who gets in?" It was a question that struck at the heart of public health research in Nigeria and beyond. With that single phrase, Professor Arulogun unveiled the often-unseen machinery behind research findings: the selection criteria that determine which individuals are invited into studies and which are quietly, sometimes unconsciously, left out.

The paper was not only a technical overview but a timely call for greater rigour and responsibility in how Nigerian researchers define, recruit and exclude their study populations. She warned that "When we ignore who gets in and who doesn't, we risk telling only half the story or worse, the wrong one."

Again, during the session, Professor

Arulogun captivated participants with a compelling deep-dive into one of research's most invisible pitfalls, selection bias. While delivering her paper, she issued a bold challenge to the nation's public health researchers: "Look beneath your data - bias may be hiding in plain sight."

Breaking down the bias, Professor Arulogun meticulously unpacked the anatomy of inclusion and exclusion criteria as cornerstones of epidemiological research that can subtly (or glaringly) skew study results when mishandled. She emphasised that while these criteria aim to refine the study sample, they must never become tools of convenience or laziness.

As she spoke, it became clear that inclusion and exclusion criteria, the methodological cornerstones of research design, can also be ticking time bombs. When applied carelessly or for convenience, they do not just shape results; they distort them. She also, illustrated how "common pitfalls" like over-selecting for easy-to-reach participants or excluding based on assumed homogeneity can create results that are "systematically skewed or non-generalisable." In practical terms, policies, interventions and health systems built on such data may fail the very populations they aim to serve. All said, she posited that in public health, where data drives policy, distorted results mean ineffective programmes, misallocated resources and lives lost.

Perhaps the most engaging moment of the session came with her interactive case-based activity titled "Who Gets In?" - a simulated research design scenario where participants navigated how to recruit students for a Lagos-based study on screen time and sleep quality. So, this session was not just theory as Professor Arulogun invited the participants into a live case study titled "The Sleep & Screen Time Study", where participants were asked to imagine designing a research project on the relationship between screen time and sleep quality among

Lagos university students: the participants engaged on the following hard-hitting questions: should students with diagnosed sleep disorders be excluded? What about those without smartphones? Is online recruitment inherently biased? What if online surveys exclude lower-income students? What role does socio-economic background play in participation? The plenary discussions revealed just how tricky and consequential these seemingly small choices can be. In fact the room buzzed with the sudden realisation of how nuanced and perilous those decisions can be.

The energy shifted as the researchers who had long prided themselves on data-driven work now found themselves wrestling with uncomfortable truths: that ease of access is not the same as representativeness; and that a larger sample size does not guarantee a better one. That sometimes, the most critical factor in determining a study's validity is not the technology or the budget, but the courage to ask whether the right people were ever asked to participate in the first place.

So, in search for solutions towards better research for better health outcomes, Professor Arulogun offered a roadmap of best practices to guard against selection bias, urging transparency, intentionality and ethical reflection in every research step. She called for broader inclusion strategies, greater care in crafting exclusion criteria and a shift from convenience to conscience; urging researchers to clearly define criteria with justification; document all exclusions transparently; use mixed recruitment strategies; and pre-test for inclusivity. She also cautioned against the false belief that larger samples automatically mean more representative findings.

At the end of the session, participants agreed on one thing: research is not just about what you find, it is about who you look at in the first place.

FINDINGS FROM POSTGRADUATE RESEARCHES

Breaking Barriers: New Research Sheds Light on Child Adoption and Donor Human Milk in Nigeria

In Nigeria's evolving healthcare landscape, two groundbreaking studies presented at the 24th NETBRECSIN Meeting are challenging age-old beliefs and igniting conversations about the future of child welfare. From Ebonyi State to the hospitals in Jos, researchers are uncovering the hopes, fears and realities that shape some of society's most sensitive decisions - child adoption and the use of donor human milk. Their findings not only reveal the pulse of public opinion but also chart a bold path forward for families, healthcare workers and policymakers alike.

We start with unveiling the realities of child adoption in Ebonyi State. Child adoption, a lifeline for families grappling with infertility and for children seeking loving homes, remains shrouded in misunderstanding and stigma across Nigeria. Dr. Cletus Chukwuemeka Nwakpa's study in Ohaukwu Local Government Area, Ebonyi State, delved deep into the knowledge and attitudes of 430 adults. While nearly 80% of respondents demonstrated good knowledge of adoption, only

4.2% had ever adopted a child. The research exposed a complex web of cultural practices, financial hurdles and the ever-present shadow of social stigma; factors that continue to dampen the acceptance of adoption. Yet, hope glimmers on the horizon as 54% of participants expressed positive attitudes towards adoption, with higher education emerging as a key driver of acceptance. The study's message is clear: healthcare workers must ramp up advocacy and education, dispelling myths and empowering communities to view adoption as a noble and viable path to parenthood.

On donor human milk (DHM), Dr. Udochukwu Michael Diala and his team explored this sensitive frontier of the use of DHM for vulnerable newborns, using Jos as a study site. Their findings indicate that DHM is untapped lifesaver in Jos. Surveying mothers of both preterm and term infants across four hospitals, the researchers discovered a landscape marked by limited knowledge and hesitant acceptance. Although awareness of DHM was similar among both groups, only a minority had good

knowledge or were willing to use donor milk for their babies. The study illuminated powerful influences of husbands, doctors and nurses who swayed mothers' decisions more than extended family or community voices. Also, religious beliefs played a crucial role, with Catholic and Muslim mothers less likely to embrace DHM. Encouragingly, a large proportion of mothers expressed willingness to donate milk, suggesting an untapped reservoir of generosity that could be harnessed with the right sensitisation.

These studies are more than academic exercises: they are mirrors reflecting the hopes, fears and untapped potential within Nigerian communities. As the findings ripple through the policy and public health circles, they challenge all stakeholders to break down barriers, foster open dialogue and champion innovative solutions for child survival. Whether it is opening hearts to adoption or nourishing the tiniest lives with donor milk, the future belongs to those bold enough to rethink tradition and embrace change for the greater good.

Celebrating Excellence

NETBRECSIN Champions Redefine Excellence

In a year marked by transformative change and relentless pursuit of progress, a constellation of visionaries within the Network on Behavioural Research for Child Survival in Nigeria (NETBRECSIN) has risen to new heights, setting bold benchmarks for academic and public health leadership. Their recent appointments and promotions are not just personal triumphs; they are powerful testaments to the spirit of innovation and dedication shaping the future of child survival and maternal health in Nigeria.

At the fore of this wave of excellence stands Professor Oyedunni Arulogun, newly appointed Vice Chancellor of Chrisland University, Abeokuta and a distinguished member of the Governing Council at the University of Ibadan. Renowned for her eloquence as the University Orator, Professor Arulogun's visionary leadership and unwavering commitment to nurturing future health professionals have made her a beacon of inspiration in academia.

Joining her in this celebration of achievement are Dr. Adegboyega Oyefabi of Kaduna State University and Dr. Balarabe Isah of Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto; now both Professors. Their ascension to the highest academic rank is a resounding affirmation of their pioneering research and dedication to shaping the next generation of medical minds. Their work not only advances knowledge but also cements their status as authorities in their respective fields.

The story of excellence continues with Dr. Misbau Titiloye (University of Ibadan), Dr. Adebola Adejimi and Dr. Tolu Olufunlayo (College of Medicine, University of Lagos) and Dr. Ruqqayah Yusuf Aliyu (Bayero University, Kano), each recently elevated to the rank of Associate Professor. Their tireless pursuit of academic distinction and commitment to societal progress underscore the transformative power of education and research. Their achievements are milestones not just for themselves, but for the

communities and students they inspire daily.

Meanwhile, in the realm of public health communication, Mr. Temitoye Falayi has been promoted to Assistant Director at the Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation. His strategic vision and expertise are instrumental in crafting messages that resonate across Nigeria, amplifying the impact of public health initiatives and bridging the gap between policy and the people it serves.

These remarkable leaders are more than the sum of their titles: they are architects of change, lighting the path for a healthier and more equitable Nigeria. As NETBRECSIN celebrates their victories, the network's collective resolve is stronger than ever, fuelling research, innovation and collaboration that will echo through generations. Their legacy is not just in accolades, but in the lives they touch and the future they are helping to build.

Candidates Share Experiences



It was an honour to have been invited to NETBRECSIN, a multidisciplinary network of some of the most brilliant minds championing child survival research in Nigeria; such opportunities are quite rare. The panel sessions on Behavioural Science and Selection Criteria in Epidemiological Research by seasoned professors were enlightening, the constructive feedback from other experienced teachers helped to enhance the quality of the students' thesis/dissertations, and the opportunity to interact with researchers from other parts of the country was an immensely rewarding experience. I sincerely appreciate my supervisor, Prof. Abigail Ogwezzy Ndisika for recommending me for this programme, the organising team, UNICEF and the distinguished professors in NETBRECSIN for the good work.

Alero Richards, Department of Mass Communication, University of Lagos



I am immensely grateful to NETBRECSIN for the technical support provided for my research proposal, submitted in partial fulfillment of a master's degree in Clinical Epidemiology. I was introduced to NETBRECSIN by my thesis supervisor, Prof. Moses Chingle, who facilitated my first meeting in Kaduna in 2021. During that meeting, I had the opportunity to present my proposal, which was thoroughly reviewed by a multidisciplinary team of erudite scholars and faculty members. Their invaluable input contributed significantly to the successful execution and defense of my thesis. Furthermore, I have presented the findings from the study at the 16th NISONM Conference and am currently in the process of publishing the results in a high-impact, peer-reviewed journal—attesting to the quality of the work. The meetings, often described as 'research boot camps,' provide a rich learning experience in an atmosphere of warmth and hospitality. Thank you, Prof. Chingle and NETBRECSIN for this remarkable experience.

Dr. Udochukwu Michael Diala, Department of Community Medicine, University of Jos



The NETBRECSIN Bi-annual meeting was such an eventful experience. The meeting has widened my understanding of research and to understand that research is not a one way approach but requires multidisciplinary collaboration. The impact of this meeting will forever be with me throughout my educational journey. To the organizers of this programme, UNICEF, FMINO, FMOH&SW, my supervisor Professor Esther Envuladu and to all the amazing souls I met, I say a very special thank you.

Habiba Kabir Muhammad, Department of Community Medicine, University of Jos



I sincerely wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to NETBRECSIN and partners on their awesome role and contributions to my academic and professional development. I have attended two (2) sessions/meetings at Kaduna in 2021 and Karu Nasarawa in 2025 where I presented both proposal and finished work on my MSc Dissertation respectively. The technical inputs from the supervisors and experts have indeed shaped and refined my knowledge and approach to research studies and applications. These testaments have assisted me in my career, and I pledged to remain a good ambassador. It is indeed a success story of positive impact. Thank you for the rare opportunity.

Cletus Chukwuemeka Nwakpa, Department of Community Health and Primary Care, College of Medicine, University of Lagos.