

PUBLIC AWARENESS AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION.ROLE OF LIBRARIANS AND INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS IN DISEASE CONTROL: THE COVID 19 EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT: It is of great importance to curtail the rise of COVID 19 cases in Nigeria which hascrippled the economy, caused unemployment and revealed the poor state of the health sector.The pandemic also caused a massive infodemic with the public bombarded with enormousamount of information with majority of it being fake and incorrect. The paper drew out theimportance of librarians and information professionals in promoting the level of awareness, levelof exposure to preventive measures, reluctance of individuals in following precautionarymeasures put in place and the factors affecting proper knowledge of COVID 19. Statistical datawere collected through the use of questionnaire administered to 600 respondents in Ife central,Ile-Ife, Osun-State and 570 copies of the questionnaire with adequate information were retrieved.The findings revealed that though respondents are aware of COVID 19, a greater percentage ofthem are not ready to take precautionary and preventive measures so as to avoid being infectedby the virus. Also, it was observed that one of the factors affecting proper knowledge of COVID19 is inadequate and incorrect information. It was therefore recommended that librariansandinformation professionals should be proactive in making correct and timely information availablefor the public.

Keywords: Infodemic, virus, information, pandemic, awareness, COVID- 19.

I. INTRODUCTION

According to World Health Organization (WHO) (2020), COVID 19 remains public enemy number one but the actions of many governments and its citizens don't reflect this. It is the duty of every single person to do their bit in breaking the chains of transmission and end the collective suffering (adhanom, 2020).

Nigeria has witnessed an increase in the community transmission of the COVID-19. COVID 19 is a huge challenge to the global economy and public health sector with no immediate answers on ground. Nigeria is faced with this huge challenge more so because of the weak economy and the shaky health sector. (Ohia, 2020). COVID 19 has spread around the world sending nations and billions of people into fear of the unknown with health services struggling to cope, educational sector frozen and economies of the nations on the downside. Nigeria's economy got contracted by 6.1%, unemployment rate has risen to 27.1 % and there is little sign of a quick turnaround in Nigeria's economic woes as the World Bank predicts Nigeria is set for its worst recession in four decades. (WEF, 2020).

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

COVID 19 pandemic has hit Nigeria really hard especially with the weak health system in the nation which has made it detrimental to the economy of the nation and the general wellbeing of the citizens. With the citizens not having full knowledge of the pandemic or ready to believe anything they hear not minding the source of the information, it has made the pandemic more severe than it really should.

A great number of people do not believe COVID 19 exist or feels COVID 19 numbers are inflated for the sake of generating money , others that believe COVID 19 is real do not have proper knowledge of how to prevent themselves and curb the spread of COVID 19. Hence it is important for information professionals to involve themselves in community engagement and awareness in disease control.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Relatively low study has been carried out on COVID 19 and this is primarily because the pandemic is relatively new, researchers and scientists are working tirelessly to make drugs/vaccine that can prevent further infections. According to Shereen, (2020), stated that coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is a highly transmittable and pathogenic viral infection caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), which emerged in Wuhan, China and spread around the world. The intermediate source of origin and transfer to humans is not known, however, the rapid human to human transfer has been confirmed widely.

COVID 19 pandemic in Nigeria

COVID 19 first confirmed case was announced on the 27th February 2020 and ever since then the pandemic has spread to all the 36 states of the federation including the federal capital territory (FCT) through community transmission. Nigerians have been enlightened and educated on different platform of media which include; television, radio jingles, adverts on bill boards, social media among others on the risk and spread of COVID 19 in the country. The Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) in line with WHO has made it mandatory for all to take some preventive measures in order to contain the spread of the pandemic. These include; regular washing of hands, wearing of face masks in public places to prevent droplets from sneeze and cough, to self-quarantine if having symptoms and make a call through to the NCDC for follow up and check.

Community participation involves engaging communities and informing them about the disease with a focus on how to protect individual and their communities. The lack of immediate community engagement and information provision for its citizens made the number of cases grow in the nation. President MuhamaduBuhari gave an order of 2 weeks lock down which took effect from Monday 30th march 2020 which was extended by another 2 weeks. Other measures taken by the government includes shutting down of religious and social gatherings, market centers. A lot of Nigerians did not follow this order majorly because of lack of information and proper awareness of the reason behind the orders. According to NCDC (2020) as at 9th February 2021, confirmed cases were 140,391 with active cases of 24,083 with 114,635 discharged cases and 1,673 deaths so far. The literacy level and poverty level in Nigeria has made it more challenging to combat the fight against the COVID 19.

Health care management involves getting things done using human, financial and material resources so that the goal of improving the health of the community can be achieved in any nation or country of the world. Since the outbreak of COVID 19 healthcare providers made guidelines that will curtail the spread of the pandemic but unfortunately this instructions are not strictly adhered to. (NCDC, 2020). Nigeria entered a second wave of coronavirus infections with new strains of the virus now in the country and COVID 19 cases and deaths surging in Africa (WHO, 2021) the help of information professionals is needed now more than ever.

The need for pandemic education and public awareness

In order to curtail the spread of covid-19 in the Nigerian communities, several activities and efforts has been put in place to educate the people about general health issues, familiarize and relate people's concerns to the universal and global measures adopted in the eradication of corona virus. Government and organizations all over the world including Nigeria adopt several methods through public awareness campaign to reach the general populace in order to sensitize, educate and provide people with protective and preventive measures on how to avoid contracting COVID-19 and if contracted, steps to be taken and appropriate agencies to contact, reducing stigmatization in the communities and dispelling rumors associated with COVID-19 among the African.

Fundaca, (2010) describe public awareness as a set of different activities planned for a specific time, addressed to a specific target group, whose aim is to increase knowledge that will lead to behavioral change and human thinking towards a specific social problem. kotler, (2002) and Andreason, (2004) describe it as an element of social marketing techniques. These techniques include advertising through different forms of media such as the internet, radio, television, oral campaign and the print formats in leaflets and bill boards. Public awareness plays an important role in terms of its public perception and draws attention of a wide audience to the problem (Borawska, 2017).

The Nigerian government has collaborated with the U. S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to raise awareness-raising campaign by negotiating with communication agencies like Airtel to produce and send out Interactive Voice Response (IVR) and Short Message Service (SMS) platforms to inform clients and users messages on social distancing, safe and easy personal hygiene practices to be adopted to prevent the community spread of the disease.

Through the public national awareness scheme, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) adopted the Take Responsibility Campaign and Breakthrough Action - Nigeria to encourage social media users to take active part in the control of the spread COVID-19 by sharing personal anecdotes on life style changes, providing accessible tips on self-isolation, discouraging social gathering and interactions in the local communities (USAID, 2020).

The rumors and fears of COVID 19 is more deadly than the disease itself. Information provided by WHO or through the national and public health authorities should be strictly followed and not information gathered through WhatsApp, Facebook and so on. According to Nelson (2020) he stated that preventing and controlling outbreaks relies on human behavior especially with the high rate of infection, the actions and behaviors of the community is the only controlling measure to the spread of COVID 19. Therefore in order for the community to conform to the measures and precautions, they need proper awareness and effective pandemic education which includes regular washing of hands with soap and water, making use of alcohol based sanitizer, avoiding crowd, maintaining at least 3 feet distance from one another, avoid touching of eyes, nose and mouth. Effective ways of coughing and sneezing, keeping up to date with relevant, latest and factual information. Public awareness is the key to the COVID 19 pandemic control. When citizens takes responsibility and are aware of their role in curbing this pandemic then COVID 19 cannot spread from one person to another again.

Importance of information professionals in information dissemination

The importance of information professionals in pandemic period cannot be overemphasized as libraries and librarians play distinctive role in providing easy access to information at the right time and disseminating to the user in appropriate formats based on user needs. Information gotten from libraries or information professional are most reliable especially in the era of infodemic where there is excessive amount of information which is sometimes incorrect and could have negative impact on finding a solution (WHO, 2020). Some of the commonly spread incorrect information about the virus includes drinking alcohol will clear the virus, taking hot bath prevents the virus, the virus cannot survive in hot weather condition and so on.

A library is the best resource of saving people from rumors and misinformation in pandemic, this is because libraries provide reliable information on latest data about ongoing research available through academic journals, books, online resources and reports they subscribed to. Fighting this infodemic is the new front in the COVID 19 battle. (Child, 2020).

In addition, with libraries shut as result of lock down, information literacy are being conducted to enlighten or alert people on COVID-19 by libraries and librarians.

Okike (2020) noted that as scientists and health professionals search for solutions to COVID-19, librarians have the important role of disseminating COVID-19–related information and resources to the public through various virtual media channels available to them, especially as most people may not come to the library or because the library may be closed during the COVID-19 pandemic. These media channels include: library running virtual information services, curating information resources for healthcare professionals, providing comprehensive search for evidence-based information, maintaining electronic interlibrary loan services among others (Nagarkar, 2020).

Everyone deserves access to factual and timely information. It is the role of information professionals and librarians to provide accurate information to the public for proper orientation about the pandemic and ways to avoid it and when contracted, what to do and how to do it. It is the job of information providers to debunk rumors about the diseases.

Information providers also should work with public health providers in information dissemination and public awareness while providing accurate and timely data for the basis of decision making. Information must be communicated to the community level, villages or remote areas. They need to know COVID 19 diagnosis is not a death sentence and what quarantine or isolation means. Nigeria has recorded a number of cases escaping in isolation centers and some refusing to leave their residence to isolation centers. All these are absence of proper orientation and public awareness.

Knowing the facts is key to being properly prepared and protecting ourselves and loved ones. Lots of information is incorrect and misinformation during a health crisis leaves people unprotected and vulnerable to disease and spreads fear and stigmatization (UNICEF, 2020)

Information professionals are of great importance because of the literacy level of millions of Nigerians who cannot read or write so information posted to NCDC website, WHO, UNICEF cannot be of use to them. The poverty level cannot give them access to internet service, systems and smart phones.

Challenges in disseminating information and community participation

There are numerous challenges associated with information dissemination of COVID 19 in Nigeria which in one way or the other affects community participation of Nigerian citizens in curbing the spread of the disease.

Information professional and information providers and public health workers are faced with lots of challenges in disseminating information

Yusof, (2020) asserted that COVID 19 pandemic have two categories of information sharing on social media that are believed to be potentially problematic and unethical: the sharing of personal information of patients and the sharing of fake news or false information. In Nigeria, it is generally observed that sharing of fake news or false information is rampant on the social media. Further, another major challenge is the fear of stigmatization. Majority of the people are not confident to disclose their health issues because of being stigmatized. There are lots of skeptics who believe COVID 19 is not real while some believe the numbers are jerked up, these people are not even ready to be given proper orientation.

In Nigeria, the cost of acquiring and the use of internet data bundle is very expensive and almost not visible to the underserved majority in many communities. The internet bundle required to service most of the technological gadgets that can disseminate useful information at the appropriate time, requires lots of data which the majority cannot often afford due to its high cost. Also because of the poverty level of millions of Nigerians, they lack access to basic amenities so even with proper orientation, little can be done for themselves for instance, access to clean water, soap and hand sanitizers can be a problem

Citizens find it difficult to adhere to instructions, for instance during the lockdown, people still held social gatherings, there were crowded places. People find it difficult to adhere to recommendations made by officials about avoiding and spreading the disease. (Iboi, 2020)

Irregular Power Supply - Generally, epileptic power supply has been the greatest challenge that has plagued the country for ages. This is an age long problem that has affected all sectors of the Nigerian economy. It affects the learning system, stagnates free flow of information especially to the underserved in the remote regions of the country. Inadequate power supply is a stumbling block in the advancement of technology in many communities, learning institutions and in the industrial sectors. Few out of the communities in Nigeria are well technologically based; many of the communities are underserved and marginally neglected. Adeoye, (2020) report that most rural areas where active youths, mostly students are residents are not connected to the national grids. This major challenge negatively cause setback in the transmission of current and genuine information.

In addition, cultural and religious beliefs, language barrier and lack of information literacy among people in the community and those in the rural areas contribute greatly to the challenges associated with information dissemination of COVID 19 pandemic in Nigeria.

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This paper examined the role of information professionals in raising awareness, community participation and curbing or controlling the rise of COVID 19 in Nigeria. In achieving this general objectives, the following specific objectives were developed to

- determine the level of awareness of COVID 19 among citizens
- find out the perception of citizens about COVID 19 pandemic
- determine the level of exposure to preventive measures available to the community
- determine the effect of information professionals on enlightening and educating citizens about COVID 19.
- ascertain the factors affecting proper knowledge and correct information service of COVID 19.

V. METHODOLOGY

Ile-Ife, a town in Osun State was used for this study. Six hundred (600) questionnaires were distributed to the residents of Ile-Ife and five hundred and seventy (570) were returned for analysis. Open ended questionnaire was used to collect information from the public. The questionnaire was divided into seven sections. The first section obtained information on respondent's gender while the second obtained information about the ages of the respondents. The third section obtained information about the level of awareness among citizens, the fourth obtained information about the perception of citizens concerning COVID 19 while the fifth was about level of exposure to preventive measures, followed by the effect of information professionals on enlightenment and education of the public. Lastly information on the factors mitigating against obtaining correct information was acquired. . The data assembled were analyzed using frequencies and percentages.

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Frequency distribution of respondent's gender

Table 1 shows the frequency distribution of respondent's gender 51% of the sample population is male while 49% represents the female population. This reveals that there were a little more male respondents than female respondents.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	286	51
Female	284	49
Total	570	100

Table 2. Frequency distribution of ages

Table 2 shows the frequency distribution of respondent's ages. The age bracket (37-46) had the most respondents with 27% of the total sample population while those under 18 had the least respondents with just 3% of the total sample size.

Age	Frequency	Percent
Under 18	15	3
18-27	108	19
27-36	126	22
37-46	156	27
47-56	112	20
57-66	28	5
67 and above	24	4
Total	570	100

Table 3 Level of awareness of COVID 19

The table reveals that 89.6% of the total population is aware of COVID 19 but only 66.6% have the knowledge of how deadly the virus is. This is in line with Okike (2020) who noted that as scientists and health professionals search for solutions to COVID-19, librarians have the important role of disseminating COVID-19-related information and resources to the public. Also 62.4% of the respondents are partially aware COVID 19 can be transmitted through sexual intercourse. This is in line with UNICEF (2020) that stated that knowing the facts is key to being properly prepared and protecting ourselves and loved ones. Lots of information is incorrect and misinformation during a health crisis leaves people unprotected and vulnerable to disease and spreads fear and stigmatization.

Items	Fully aware	%	Partially aware	%	Not Aware	%
Are you aware of COVID 19	511	89.6	55	9.6	4	0.7
Do you know it is a deadly disease	380	66.6	65	11.4	125	21.9
It can be transmitted through sexual intercourse	212	37.1	356	62.4	2	0.3
Droplets after coughing or sneezing	552	96.8	18	3.1	0	0
Touching infected persons	536	94	37	6.4	0	0
Use of object by an infected persons.	484	84.9	80	14	6	1
Signs of corona virus is fever, sore throat and muscle aches	494	86.6	69	12.1	7	1.2
Difficulty in breathing	536	94	30	5.2	4	0.7
Loss of taste and smell	440	77.1	125	21.9	5	0.8
Chest /lung pain	535	93.8	32	5.6	1	0.1
Dry cough	527	92.4	40	7	2	0.3
Loss of speech or movement	344	60.3	223	39.1	3	0.5

Table 4 Perception of citizens about COVID 19

The table revealed that 41.4% believes that COVID 19 is genetic while 57.5% is of the opinion that it is not genetic. This is in line with WHO (2020) who stated that in this era of infodemic, there is excessive amount of information on a problem (COVID-19) which is sometimes incorrect and could have negative impact on finding a solution.

The cause of COVID 19 is

Items	Yes	%	No	%	Don't know	%
Virus	536	94	31	5.5	3	0.5
Genetic diseases	236	41.4	328	57.5	6	1
Infectious diseases	516	90.5	60	10.5	3	0.5
Immunodeficiency	376	65.9	144	25.2	50	8.77

Table 5 level of exposure to preventive measures

The table revealed that 20.7% of the respondents do not know that avoiding crowded places is a way to prevent COVID 19. This is in line with Fundaca, (2010) stated the importance of public awareness as a set of different activities planned for a specific time, addressed to a specific target group, whose aim is to increase knowledge that will lead to behavioral change and human thinking towards a specific social problem.

Items	Yes	%	No	%	Don't know	%
Washing of hands	555	97.3	15	2.6	0	0
Touching of eyes, nose or mouth.	548	96.1	19	3.3	3	0.5
Covering of nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing	558	97.8	10	1.7	2	0.3
Using of face mask in public	562	98.5	8	1.4	0	0
Avoiding crowded places	452	79.2	118	20.7	0	0

Table 6 Information professionals and public enlightenment

Table 6 shows that 54.5% of the total respondents attends public functions, this is line with Nelson (2020) who stated that preventing and controlling outbreaks relies on human behavior especially with the high rate of infection, the actions and behaviors of the community is the only controlling measure to the spread of COVID 19. Also, only 24% of respondents always wear face masks in public. This is in line with Adhanom (2020) who stated that it is the duty of every single person to do their bit in breaking the chains of transmission and end the collective suffering. Furthermore, only 2.8% of the respondents avoid shaking hands with friends and colleagues, this is line with Iboi (2020) who stated that people find it difficult to adhere to recommendations made by officials about avoiding and spreading the disease.

Items	Always	%	Often	%	Sometimes	%	Rarely	%	Never	%
Do you attend public functions e.g. parties	129	22.6	311	54.5	93	16.3	31	5.4	6	1
Do you avoid crowded places	63	11	147	25.7	68	11.9	266	46.6	26	4.5
Do you make use of face mask	137	24	226	39.6	97	17	89	15.6	21	3.6
Do you wash your hands	133	23.3	169	29.6	189	33.1	53	9.2	26	4.5
Do you use hand sanitizers	83	14.5	104	18.2	82	14.3	236	41.4	65	11.4
Do you shake hands with friends, colleagues	101	17.7	245	42.9	123	21.5	85	14.9	16	2.8
Do you maintain social distancing when you go out	77	13.3	97	17	133	23.3	223	40.8	40	7
Do you avoid touching your eyes,	56	9.8	98	17.1	167	29.2	207	36.3	42	7.3

nose or mouth in public										
Do you cover your nose and mouth when you cough or sneeze	61	10.7	121	21.2	178	31.2	182	31.9	28	4.9
Do you stay at home if you feel unwell	99	17.3	234	41	108	18.9	93	16.3	36	6.3

Table 7 Factors affecting proper knowledge of COVID 19

The table elicited information that indicated that 77.5% of the respondents believed incorrect or inadequate information is one of the factors affecting proper knowledge of COVID 19. This is in line with Yusof (2020) who stated that in Nigeria, it is generally observed that sharing of fake news or false information is rampant on the social media.

Items	Yes	%	No	%	Don't know	%
Incorrect/ inadequate information	442	77.5	125	21.9	3	0.5
Access to newspapers	332	58.2	238	41.7	0	0
Access to internet facility	370	64.9	200	35	0	0
Access to media outlets	331	58.1	239	41.9	0	0
Misinformation on precautionary steps	398	69.8	170	29.8	2	0.3
Lack of correct information on health and hygiene education	406	71.2	159	27.8	5	0.8
Lack of information on measures put in place by government	404	70.8	165	28.9	1	0.1

Conclusion and recommendations

This paper reveals in whole that majority of the public is aware of what COVID 19 is and what precautionary measure to take to avoid contracting the virus but they are not ready to abide by those rules and take action against the spread of COVID 19. It is the role of information professionals to further educate members of the public on the severity of disregarding the COVID 19 rules and regulations. A healthy society free of COVID 19 will bring out economic stability, growth and happiness. Hence, the following recommendations were made:

- The government should partner with information professionals in tackling the deadly corona virus by giving them the opportunity to work and embark on proper information dissemination to the public.
- Information professionals should be encouraged to work in tandem with public health workers by offering assistance, advisory role and community participation.
- Information professionals and librarians should support research teams, researchers and faculty in tackling the corona virus pandemic.
- Information professionals and librarians should meet the core needs of regular users by providing virtual support, document delivery and literature searches.

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