

COVID-19 PROTOCOLS AND THE SPREAD OF CORONA VIRUS IN AWKA

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ABSTRACT: This study investigated the attitude towards COVID-19 protocols and the spread of corona virus in town of Awka. The study x-rayed the COVID-19 protocols in Awka and the extent to which these protocols are adhered to in the town of Awka to prevent its spread. The research answered four research questions with the aim of making recommendations that will help to curb the spread of the pandemic. The researchers adopted the social cognitive theory because it best explains the attitude of the inhabitants of Awka towards COVID-19 protocols. Using Taro Yamane, the researchers derived a sample size of 383 from 3 markets (Eke Awka, First market and Second market Ifite) that were purposively sampled. The population for this study was randomly chosen so as to give every respondent equal chance of being represented. The data used for this study were derived through internet materials, participant observation and questionnaire. Data were presented in tables and analysed using simple percentages. Findings revealed that the inhabitants of Awka know that COVID-19 exists and is prevalent in Nigeria. It also found out that there are COVID-19 protocols in Awka but most of the inhabitants of Awka do not adhere strictly to it and also, these protocols are not enforced by security personnel in Awka. This study therefore recommends the proper use and handling of the face mask and the adherence to social distancing. The enforcement of laws against COVID-19 protocol violations should be seen as a point of duty by security operatives so as to serve as deterrent to others.

Keywords: COVID-19, Social Distance, Protocol.

INTRODUCTION

Background to the study

Coronaviruses are zoonotic that are normally transmitted between animals and people. It is caused by a new strain of coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) that has not been previously identified in humans. It was first reported to World Health Organization (WHO) on the 31st of December 2019 in Wuhan, China. The pandemic has affected the state of things in every society from February 2019 till date. Preventive measures like the wearing of face mask, improved hygiene and the lockdown of economic and social activities were put in place by the government and the compliance of COVID- 19 protocols which included social or physical distancing and wearing of face mask was made mandatory in every state.

Thus, individuals who complied wore face mask and restricted entry to their business places to those who complied with the wearing of these masks. They also ensured the provision of water

and soap to ensure that people washed their hands more frequently especially before they enter their shops or place of business.

Even as these measures were practiced, coronavirus was not eradicated rather; a more severe strain of coronavirus was discovered in the world. This caused the death of many Nigerians and made many others sick. The Nigeria Center for Disease Control (2020) reported that they worked with states and has supported them in their capacity but, the limited capacity of prompt diagnosis and management of cases due to limited molecular laboratories and few Infectious Diseases Care Centers (IDCC) has retarded their efforts aimed at tackling the pandemic.

In view of this, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021) suggested the proper wearing of face mask, social or physical distancing and washing of hands more frequently under running water for 20 seconds. However, the extent to which these measures are practiced in Awka calls for empirical investigation.

Problem of the Study

In line with the COVID-19 protocol, most people have bought face mask to protect themselves and others from contracting the virus. They seem to have become more careful in gatherings and try to avoid unnecessary gatherings and parties. Likewise, most business places seem to have made provision for hand sanitizers and hand wash by providing water in tap like buckets and soap. However, instead of the complete eradication of the virus, the virus seems to have continued to spread widely.

This may be because most people may not have practiced the COVID-19 protocols properly. They may not have sanitized or washed their hands as frequently as they should. Even when they do wash their hands, they do not wash them under running water for 20 seconds or more. Also, some people may not have worn or handled their face mask well after use thereby, causing the continuous spread of the virus.

Research Questions

In view of the above, this study tried to give answer to the following questions.

- What are the measures practised in Awka to reduce the spread of COVID-19?
- How well are these measures being adhered to?
- How can the spread of COVID- 19 be reduced and possibly curbed in Nigeria?

These questions will enable the researcher investigate the ways in which COVID-19 protocols are being practised so as to make recommendations that will reduce and possibly curb the spread of the pandemic in Awka.

METHODOLOGY

Awka is a town in Awka South LGA. The Area has a population of 250,900 as at 2016 (National Populations Commission, 2016). It is the capital of Anambra state and the seat of government within the state. The researchers adopted a descriptive research design so as to adequately describe the behavior towards COVID-19 protocols.

The researchers used Taro Yamane to derive a sample population of 399 from the three major areas where economic activities take place. These places are; First market, Second market Ifite and Eke Awka. The researchers distributed 133 copies of questionnaire to each of the locations that were purposively chosen because they are economically active. A sample size of 383 comprising 130 persons from Eke Awka and First market and 123 persons from second market was derived. These areas were purposively chosen because people tend to cluster in these areas in the process of buying and selling.

Simple random sampling technique was adopted in choosing the respondents so as to give every individual a chance of being represented. The researchers made use of participant observation, questionnaire and internet materials in deriving data for this study. However, data were presented in tables and analysed using simple percentage.

Literature Review

An Overview of COVID- 19 and COVID-19 Protocols in Nigeria

Coronaviruses are a large family of ribonucleic acid (RNA) viruses that infect birds and many mammals including humans. These viruses cause illnesses that range from common cold to more severe respiratory diseases and rarely gastroenteritis (NCDC, 2020).

Person-to-person transmission has been established between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 2 metres/6 feet), primarily via respiratory droplets. Droplet transmission occurs when respiratory droplets generated via coughing, sneezing or talking contact susceptible mucosal surfaces, such as the eyes, nose or mouth. Transmission may also occur indirectly via contact with contaminated fomites with hands and then mucosal surfaces (NCDC, 2020).

The NCDC (2020) opined that symptoms may develop within 14 days after exposure to COVID-19. According to them, these symptoms may include: cough, shortness of breath or difficulty in breathing, fever, sore throat, body pain, recent loss of taste or smell, runny nose/catarrh and fatigue (tiredness).

The Nigerian government in section 4 of the Quarantine Act, Cap.Q2 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria (2010) had already put in place Restrictions on Gatherings in case of such eventuality. In the face of the corona virus pandemic, these restrictions were enforced and included that social/physical distance should be at least two metres away from one person to another at all times. However, no gathering of more than 50 persons shall hold in an enclosed space, except for

religious purposes, in which case the gathering shall not exceed 50% capacity of the space. In view of this, anyone who goes against these laws is liable to be punished; irrespective of their social status.

Guidelines for Social Distancing

What is social distancing?

The NCDC (2020) defined social distancing as a strategy aimed at reducing physical contact between persons with the aim of slowing down and reducing the spread of COVID-19. This measure involves strict adherence to non-physical greetings like hand shaking or hugs; maintaining at least 2 metres (6 feet) physical distance between yourself and the next person and closure of activities that will cause any form of gathering. In furtherance to these laws, members of society were advised to wash their hands regularly with soap and water or use an alcohol-based sanitizer, if water and soap are available. Religious leaders were charged with the responsibility of ensuring that this information on social distancing and other preventive measures is widely disseminated (NCDC, 2020).

Advisory use of cloth face mask

Due to the global shortage of medical face masks in several countries attention has been drawn to alternatives to medical face masks by the general public. However, cloth face mask, made out of everyday fabric can act as a barrier to respiratory droplets but cannot completely serve as protection against COVID-19. Hence, in addition to the cloth face mask, members of the public were advised to avoid large gatherings, maintain physical distancing, practice regular hand wash with soap under running water for 20 seconds, and frequently clean surfaces with soap and water or disinfectants (NCDC, 2020).

However, health care workers and those caring for the sick, those experiencing respiratory symptoms like coughing and sneezing, the elderly and those with chronic medical conditions were advised to use a medical face mask.

Also, cloth face mask should not be used on children under the age of 2 years and new masks from vendors should not be worn immediately after purchasing, rather they should be washed before first use. Before reusing a cloth face mask, it has to be washed and dried. Used face mask should not be kept on unclean surfaces or in the reach of small children while not in use. Members of the public are also not expected to pull down their mask to cough or sneeze. Rather, tissue should be used or your bent elbow over the mask until the mask can safely be removed for washing (NCDC, 2020).

Handling and Care of Cloth Masks

Cloth face masks are reusable, thus, it is very important that cloth face masks are handled and cared for properly to avoid the further spread of the virus. The NCDC (2020) suggests that it is necessary to ensure that the mask has been washed and is unused before first wear. Also before

touching the mask, wash your hands with soap under running water and if water is not available, use a hand sanitizer.

It is important to cover ones nose and mouth completely with the mask, making sure it fits snugly with no open gaps. Members of the public should avoid touching or adjusting the mask while it is on and wash or sanitise your hands before removing the mask by the straps. When mask is removed, wash immediately with soap or detergent, allow to dry completely under the sun and ironing before re-use.

Offences and Penalties

Any person who contravenes the provisions of these regulations commits an offence. Also, any person who, without reasonable cause, obstructs an authorised official from enforcement of these regulations commits an offence. The offence under these regulations is punishable, on summary conviction, by a fine or a term of six months imprisonment or both in accordance with Section 5 of the Quarantine Act.

Theoretical Framework

The social cognitive theory was adopted for this study because it best explains the behavior of the inhabitants of Awka towards the COVID-19 protocols. This theory was developed by Stanford psychologist Albert Bandura. It views people as active agents who are both influenced by their environment. A major component of the theory is observational learning of desirable and undesirable behaviours by observing others, then reproducing learned behaviours in order to maximize rewards.

There is no doubt that there are regulations and enforcements against the prohibition of COVID-19 protocols. However, these regulations and laws are not totally/completely enforced. Members of the public have come to believe that they won't be punished if they go against any of the COVID-19 protocols. Hence, they disregard these protocols and discourage or make fun of those who want to abide by these protocols.

Therefore, it may seem normal to disregard the COVID-19 protocol, coupled with the fact that some of these protocols mitigate against our communal lifestyle like gathering together for meetings and regular visit of friends and relatives in which every African society is known for.

Answer to Questionnaire Questions

| S/N | Questions | Response | Percentage |
|-----|--|---|---|
| 1. | Do you think COVID-19 is exists? | Yes 250 No 133 | 65.3% 34.7% |
| 2. | Do you think COVID-19 is prevalent in Nigeria? | Yes 195 No 188 | 50.9% 49.1% |
| 3. | Do you have a face mask? | Yes 273 No 110 | 71.3% 28.7% |
| 4. | How regularly do you wear your face mask? | Often 100 Not 283 | often 26.1% 73.9% |
| 5. | How often do you change your face mask? | Very 87 Often 62 Sometimes 151 Never 83 | often 22.7% 16.2% 39.4% 21.7% |
| 6. | How often do you wash your face mask? | Very 101 Often 98 Sometimes 111 Never 73 | often 26.4% 25.6% 29% 19.1% |
| 7. | How frequently do you wash your hands with soap? | Very 83 Often 139 Sometimes 161 Never 0 | often 21.7% 36.3% 42% 0% |
| 8. | Do you wash your hand under running water? | Yes 133 | 34.7% 65.3% |

| | | | |
|-----|--|---|---------------------------------|
| | | No 250 | |
| 9. | How often do you wash your hands under running water? | Very often 56 Often 37 Sometimes 159 Never 131 | 14.6% 9.7% 41.5% 34.2% |
| 10. | Do you wash your hand for 20 seconds and more or less than 20 seconds? | 20seconds> 263 <20 seconds 120 | 68.7% 31.3% |
| 11. | Do you have a hand sanitizer? | Yes 282 No 101 | 73.6% 26.4% |
| 12. | How often do you use your hand sanitizer? | Regularly 59 Not regularly 324 | 15.4% 84.6% |
| 13. | Do you observe social/physical distancing? | Yes 198 No 185 | 51.7% 48.3% |
| 14. | Are you conscious of the fact that you should avoid gatherings and crowd places? | Yes 250 No 133 | 65.3% 34.7% |

Findings from the research observation

The researchers observed that most gatherings exceed the population of 50 persons, with no social distancing. Temperatures are not being checked in most public gatherings or places and people do not bend their elbows or use a handkerchief while coughing or sneezing. While at the onset of the pandemic provisions for regular hand wash was made in most public places, at the later stage of the pandemic, most places stopped providing water, soap and even hand sanitizers. While hugging and handshake seem to have reduced greatly, people still hug and shake hands with each other.

The practice of electronic money giving has not been encouraged so far especially in churches. Offerings and tithes are paid with physical cash and most people who use cloth facemask do not wash, dry and iron them daily. However, the majority of the masses have stopped using their facemask while those who use it put it on their jaw or below their nose. The Nigerian security

agencies, who are supposed to enforce the punishment on COVID-19 protocol violation, seem to collect bribes from these violators instead of bringing them to book.

Research findings

- The inhabitants of Awka affirm that COVID-19 exists and is prevalent in Nigeria.
- The inhabitants of Awka affirm that there are COVID-19 protocols in Awka but most of the inhabitants of Awka do not practise these protocols properly.
- The securities personnel in Awka are not enforcing the law on COVID-19 protocols.

Discussion of findings

- **The inhabitants of Awka affirm that COVID-19 is real and is prevalent in Nigeria.**

Findings revealed that the inhabitants of Awka are aware of the existence of COVID-19 and its prevalence in Nigeria. This is in line with the World Health Organisation's declaration of its status as a pandemic in 2019. It also means that the inhabitants of Awka are aware of the presence of the pandemic in the country.

- **The inhabitants of Awka affirm that there are COVID-19 protocols in Awka but most of the inhabitants of Awka do not practice these protocols properly.**

Even though most inhabitants have facemask, they do not use, change or wash it frequently. They also do not adhere to the non-physical greetings like hand shaking or hugs and the maintenance of social distancing as directed by (NCDC, 2020).

While most inhabitants agreed that they wash their hands frequently, most of them do not wash their hands under running water for a minimum of 20 seconds. They also do not make use of hand sanitizers. This could be because of their inability to afford one, access running water, ignorance or lack of patience in carrying out a proper hand wash exercise. However, this contravenes the NCDC (2020) guidelines which advised members of the society to wash their hands regularly with soap and water or use an alcohol based sanitizer if no water and soap was available.

Also, these facemasks are to be worn properly in line with the NCDC directive which states that face mask should be worn correctly; covering ones nose and mouth completely, changed, washed, dried under the sun and ironed before reuse (NCDC, 2020).

The directive further states that members of the public should avoid touching or adjusting the mask while it is on; wash or sanitise their hands before removing the mask by the straps.

- **Enforcement of the law on COVID-19 protocols by security personnel in Awka.**

Findings revealed that the securities personnel in Awka are not prosecuting defaulters of COVID-19 protocol. Rather, they collect bribe and allow defaulters to go without persecution.

This contradicts the COVID-19 law which states that any person who contravenes the provisions of COVID-19 regulations or without reasonable cause, obstructs an authorised official from the enforcement of these regulations commits an offence which is punishable, on summary conviction, by a fine or a term of six months imprisonment or both in accordance with Section 5 of the Quarantine Act.

Conclusion

Corona-virus is a pandemic that is wide spread however, its level of infection is determinant on our attitude and behavior towards its protocols. While some behaviors may have heightened its spread, a strict compliance with COVID-19 protocols as advised by the NCDC would reduce the spread of the virus even in the absence of adequate testing kits, laboratories and Infectious Diseases Care Centers in the country.

Therefore, even as these protocols are adhered to, the following recommendations are necessary for a healthy and corona virus free society.

Recommendations

In view of these, the following recommendations were made. They are:

- Correct use of facemask should be encouraged. Those who use facemask should do so in addition to other measures such as physical distancing, hand washing and respiratory hygiene measures in Nigeria.
- Used facemask should be properly disposed of in waste bins while cloth facemask should be washed, dried under the sun and ironed before reuse.
- Also, those who use cloth face mask should use them in addition to other preventive measures like social distancing, hand washing, respiratory hygiene, cleaning and disinfecting frequently touched surfaces.
- Restrictions like no face mask, no entry should be placed on business places and religious centres. There should be public enlightenment on the issue of COVID-19 and COVID-19 protocols by religious bodies, traditional institutions and relevant bodies like women and students' groups should be involved.
- Public places and religious centres should make provisions for hand washing and sanitizers by providing water, soap and hand sanitizer and the checking of temperature.
- Furthermore, the securities personnel should enforce the COVID-19 regulations judiciously, without favour or sentiments.

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