

Corona Virus (COVID-19) Related Issues and Teenagers in Nsukka Local Government Area: Implication of the Media

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Abstract

This study focused on awareness and attitude of teenagers towards Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in Nsukka Local Government Area. Specifically, it determined: extent to which teenagers are aware of COVID-19; attitude of teenagers towards COVID-19 safety protocols, and role of media in enhancing the awareness of COVID-19 and safety protocols adoption among the teenagers. Population comprised of senior secondary school (SSS) students. Two types of questionnaire were used for data collection. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. Findings reveal six awareness indicators (>2.50). These include symptoms of coronavirus, causes of coronavirus, and measures to manage the spread of coronavirus. The teenagers could be said to be 75 percent aware of COVID-19. Also the teenagers indicated positive attitude to eight attitude indicators. Further, 11 roles the media could play in enhancing teenagers' awareness and adoption of protocols were identified. These include obtaining and dissemination up to date information, tracking of outbreaks in different communities and promoting peer-to-peer health communication. Based on the findings eight recommendations were made, these include that, information being disseminated across by the media about the coronavirus should be obtained from the right sources and should be properly vetted, and the media should partner with other organizations such as religious organizations such and churches and mosques with the aim of educating people on the adoption of safety protocols.

Keywords: Media, Pandemic, Coronavirus, Teenagers' Perception.

Introduction

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. The origin of the coronavirus is said to have been traced to the Wuhan seafood market in Wuhan, China in late 2019 (Centre for

Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). The outbreak *was* declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on 30 January 2020 and on 11th of February 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced COVID-19 as the name of

this new disease. The novel coronavirus was declared a pandemic in March 11th 2020 and as at 29th September 2020, there has been more than 33 million cases worldwide and more than 1 million deaths (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). Furthermore, despite the level of advancement in the health systems of high-income countries, they are the worst hit in terms of disease burden and total COVID-19 related deaths. With no proven treatments available and posing a significant threat to healthcare systems, most nations including Nigeria, aim to flatten the curve by applying strict prevention and control measurements aimed at curbing the disease.

The common symptoms associated with the coronavirus include; loss of sense of smell, loss of sense of taste, difficulty in breathing, persistent coughing and high fever (Akarika, Udo and Ikon, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has been compared to earlier pandemics such as the Spanish flu of 1918 that infected more than 200 million individuals worldwide, killing more than 10.5 million (Humphrey, 2018). Though the infection and mortality rates are not as much as Spanish flu, the global impact has been touted to be even more, as the coronavirus has led to the closure of several business across different sectors of the world economy, led to the shutdown of cities worldwide, grounded global aviation, led to the stoppage of sports activities as well as drastically reduced the gathering of

large groups of people (Shereen, Khan, Kazmi, Bashire and Siddique, 2020).

Nigeria recorded its first case on the 28th of February 2020 which happened to be the first case of the coronavirus in sub-Saharan Africa. The patient was an Italian citizen who works in Nigeria and flew into the commercial city of Lagos from Milan on 25th February but has since made a full recovery. After which many others cases have been recorded in 34 states of the federation and the federal capital territory (Amzat, Aminu, Kolo, Akinyele, Ogundaro and Danjibi, 2020). Unfortunately, a good number of Nigerians believe that the coronavirus is in Nigeria. When reports came that the virus was finally in Nigeria and that it was brought in by an Italian, Nigerians went about their normal activities as they were convinced the virus does not affect the black race. There were speculations that the sub-Saharan weather was too hot for the coronavirus to survive and also, that the use of chloroquine does not only prevent one from being infected with the virus, but actually also effectively kills the coronavirus (Babatunde, 2020). However, these claims have proved not to be substantiated as infection rates increased considerable as well as mortality rates. As at September 30th 2020, there had been 64,312 total cases, 1,174 COVID-19 related deaths and 57,640 recoveries in Nigeria (Suleiman, Aminu, Abdullahi and Sulieman, 2020). In order to quell the spread of the pandemic, it has become imperative to institute preventive and

control measures nationally and at the community level. These preventive measures promulgated by the government, through health authorities and also non-governmental organizations and religious bodies include frequent washing of hands, the use of hand sanitizer, social-distancing between people, ban of inter-state travel as well as a ban on large gatherings. The adoption of these safety measures however have significantly affected normal economic and social activities as it forced many markets to close as well as stopped religious gatherings for long time period. However, over time, tiered relaxation of the lockdown restrictions

Teenagers are individuals within the age bracket of 13 to 19 years old. These individuals are characterized by rapid growth, increased rate of cognitive development, development of feelings of independence and cultural expressions. Teenage years are the last stage of life before adulthood, thus it is at that stage that individuals learn how to make decisions and take responsibilities. United Nations Department of Economics and Social Affairs (2018) mentioned that teenage years prepare individuals for adulthood and it is at this stage that the brain reaches 90% of its development. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2018), teenagers constitute more than 32 % of the total population of Nsukka, thus giving them a significant voice as well as making them able to exert a significant influence on the total population of the town. Teenagers

sometimes include both secondary school and university undergraduate students. They are a very sensitive segment of the population as they usually champion new trends in the society.

The perception of coronavirus amongst teenagers is significantly influenced by the premise that when people do not know anyone who is infected with or died from the virus, then it does not exist. According to Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (2020), people initially perceived coronavirus as not affecting tropical areas because of the hot weather and also that the virus cannot stand chloroquine, which is a content of various medicines that are taken by people in Nigeria. The author further mentioned that many perceive the virus as affecting only wealthy people and being "God's judgment on the world". Furthermore, World Health Organization (2020) mentioned that many perceive coronavirus as not much different from malaria fever that is prevalent in the society, thus there is no need for any extra health precautions. However, with significant surge in both infection and casualty figures, as well as issues of under-reporting of cases have proved that communities in sub-Saharan Africa can be affected by the virus.

Awareness is defined as the state of being conscious of a situation or an act. According to Savrum and Leon (2015), awareness can be described as knowledge and understanding about a situation as well as measures that can be taken in order to improve the

existing situation. In order to promote awareness about a situation, it is imperative that individuals are properly informed about the existing situation by having adequate background information and are continually up to date on events influencing the situation. Awareness and attitude, though different, usually go hand in hand in studies. Attitude can be described as a disposition or feeling regarding a situation or event. It can be further defined as the opinion, orientation and outlook of individuals towards an event or a situation (Akarika, Udo and Ikon, 2020). The attitude of individuals towards a situation or phenomena influences their level of awareness of the situation. This is due to the fact that attitude influences people's search for knowledge and information about a situation. According to Tsftati and Peri (2006), attitudes such as skepticism prevents individuals from believing in the existence of a situation and also makes them lethargic about seeking information about the subject. The author further mentioned that positive attitudes also influence proper intelligence gathering as well as creating workable solutions to problems that might arise as a result of the challenge.

The media in the context of this work is regarded as the main means of mass communication regarded collectively. The media can also be defined as the communications outlets and tools to store and deliver information. According to Adalakun and Adna (2016), the media refers to

the different components of mass media communication industry such as the print media, the broadcast media, news media, photography and the social media. The author further mentioned that the media always has characteristics such as target audience, audience size, agenda and interactiveness. The media is important because of its position as a veritable source of information for the populace as well as a means of exerting influence for achieving given objectives. According to Obi-Ani, Anikwenze and Isiani (2020), the media can play a role in agenda setting for the population by continually disseminating information that not only educates the populace but also influences their thoughts and mode of action.

Events of public concern such as health issues attract media concern from both the print, electronic and social media. The media has been significantly influential since the breakout of the COVID-19 pandemic by being a veritable source of information on issues relating to symptoms of the virus as well as efforts being made in developing antidotes towards its cure. Furthermore, the media has been a means of disseminating information on safety practices and protocols that are to be adopted for reducing the rate of spread of the illness while research goes on towards developing the antidote. According to Shareen, Khan, Kazmi, Bashir, and Siddique (2020), different organizations such as religious bodies, corporate

organizations, non-governmental organizations as well as government bodies have partnered with the media in efforts aimed at increasing the awareness level of the populace through adverts, news updates, social media posts and sensitization programs. Also, Quattrin, Fitputt and Brusafiero (2015) also mentioned that the media has the potential to influence health related behaviours and perceptions among individuals. The authors further mentioned that the media can be used independently and complementarily in the promotion of healthy living lifestyles as well as promoting development of coping mechanisms during periods of health challenges. However, inspite of thee tremendous media efforts, there is not yet an optimal level of awareness of individuals about the COVID-19 pandemic. It is on the backdrop of these that this study is undertaken, with the aim of evolving ways that the awareness and attitude of teenagers in Nsukka LGA towards coronavirus could be promoted by the media as well as suggesting measures to increase safety protocols that are outlined by health authorities. This study is vital due to the high proportion of teenage population in Nsukka metropolis as well as the significant influence exerted by teenagers within the family. Furthermore, these teenagers are significantly influenced by the media, especially the social media as it is their main source of information as well as a veritable means for them to communicate with their peers. The

study also will also serve as a veritable means of educating individuals about the virus, its reality, the safety protocols involved with managing the virus, as well as emphasizing the need for proper knowledge and information about the virus and the resultant pandemic.

Purpose of the Study

This study focused on awareness and attitudes of teenagers towards the coronavirs (COVID-19) in Nsukka LGA. Specifically, the study determined:

1. extent to which teenagers are aware of COVID-19 in Nsukka LGA.
2. attitude of teenagers towards the safety protocols of COVID-19.
3. role of media in enhancing COVID-19 awareness and safety protocols adoption among teenagers in Nsukka LGA.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study.

1. To what extent do teenagers in Nsukka LGA aware of COVID-19?
2. What are the attitudes of teenagers towards the safety protocols for containing the spread of COVID-19?
3. What roles should media play in enhancing COVID-19 awareness and attitude of teenagers towards COVID-19 safety protocols?

Methodology

Design of the Study: The study adopted a descriptive survey research design.

Area of the study: The study area was Nsukka LGA in Enugu State in South-East Nigeria. Nsukka is a University town located in Enugu State, which is within the south-east geo-political zone of Nigeria. Nsukka has an area of 1,810 km² has an estimated population of 329,610 inhabitants (Ozioko, 2005). It is the site of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, which is the first indigenous university in Nigeria. The area is the most populated amongst the 17 local government areas in Enugu State.

Population for the study: The population for this study consisted of two categories of people; teenagers in secondary schools in public secondary schools in Nsukka local government area and lecturers of Mass Communication in the University of Nigeria. There are a total of 32 public secondary schools in Nsukka LGA, with a population of 9,107. This population consisted of 3,032 senior secondary students, comprising of 1,902 female and 1,130 male teenagers (Eze, Ugwuanyi and Orsu, 2016). The senior secondary students (SSS) were chosen for this study due to the fact that they fell into the teenage age range of 13 to 19 years of age. Also, there was a total of 48 academic staff in the Department of Mass Communication students in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. They were involved in this study in order to

ascertain the role of the media in improving awareness and attitude of teenagers towards safety protocols outlined for managing with the virus.

Sample for the study: A total of 250 SSS teenagers were purposively selected for the study. These were the teenagers who could be accessed at the time of the study because of the COVID-19 lockdown in the area of the study. Also a sample of 28 academic staff of Mass Communication in the University of Nigeria was selected. This sample for the study was made up of 278 respondents.

Instrument for Data Collection: Two sets of questionnaire were used for data collection. The first was teenagers' questionnaire used to ascertain the extent of their awareness of COVID-19 pandemic and their attitude towards outlined safety protocols. The second questionnaire was for academic staff of Mass Communication Department to ascertain the role of the media in promoting awareness and attitude of teenagers towards outlined safety protocols. Each questionnaire had a four-point response scale. The instruments were face validated by three experts in Health Education.

Method of data collection: A total of 278 copies, (250 and 28 copies to SSS teenagers and lecturers respectively), of the questionnaires were distributed by hand to respondents with the help of two research assistants. A total of 239 copies of the questionnaires were filled and returned.

Data analysis techniques: Data obtained were analyzed using means based on a 4-point scale. Mean scores

of 2.50 and above were taken as the basis of deciding whether an item indicates an acceptable level of awareness, positive attitude, as well as media role in improving adoption of safety protocol. Mean scores of below 2.5 were taken as unacceptable levels

of awareness, not positive attitude and media role in improving the adoption of safety protocols.

Findings of the study

The following findings were made from this study.

Table 1: Mean Responses (X) and Standard Deviation (SD) on the Awareness Level of Teenagers about COVID-19.

S/N	Awareness Indicators	Responses		
		X	SD	Remark
1	Causes of Corona virus	3.1	.91	A
2	Scenarios that bring about spread of coronavirus	3.0	.84	A
3	Symptoms of coronavirus	3.1	.94	A
4	Measures to manage the spread of coronaviurs	2.9	.83	A
5	Steps to take when infected with cornavirus	2.3	.78	NA
6	Differences between coronavirus and malaria fever	3.1	1.1	A
7	Knowledge of safety protocols outlined by WHO	3.0	.98	A
8	Knowledge of medical efforts towards cure	2.2	.72	NA

Key: X = Mean, SD = standard deviation. A = Awaewness NA = No Awareness

Table 1 shows the awareness indicators used to judge the awareness of teenagers of the coronavirus. Six out of the eight indicators have mean (X) scores of >2.50. This shows that the

teenagers are aware of six out of the eight indicators of COVID-19 awareness. This means that the teenagers were aware of 75 percent of COVID-19 awareness indicators.

Table 2: Mean Responses on Attitudes of Teenagers towards COVID-19 Safety Protocols

COVID-19		Awareness Reponse		
S/N	Safety protocols for COVID-19	X	SD	Remark
1	Regular washing of hands	3.2	.92	PA
2	Use of hand sanitizer	3.0	.86	PA
3	Physical distancing during gatherings	2.8	.82	PA
4	Wearing of face-mask outside	3.1	.88	PA
5	Covering the mouth when sneezing and coughing	2.9	.86	PA
6	Consciousness of loss of sense of smell and taste	2.7	.81	PA
7	Avoidance of crowded indoor gatherings	2.8	.82	PA
8	Avoidance of close contact with infected person	3.0	.87	PA
9	No frequent touching of mouth and nose	2.4	.71	NPA
10	Practice of 'no-touch' greeting	2.1	.63	NPA
11	Adherence to other national and state directives	2.3	.61	NPA

Key: X = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, PA = Postive Attitude, NPA = Not Positive Attitude

Table 2 shows mean responses on attitudes of teenagers towards the different safety protocol measures recommended by health authorities. The Table indicates that the teenagers indicated "Positive attitude" to eight out of the 11 safety protocols for COVID-19 ($X > 2.50$). It could thus be said that they were positively disposed to 73 percent of the protocols.

Table 3: Mean Responses on Roles of the Media towards Influencing Teenagers' Perception of Coronavirus in Nsukka LGA.

S/N	Role of Media	X	SD	Remark
1	Obtaining and disseminating up to date information	3.1	.92	MR
2	Facilitating communication between medical researchers public health experts, funding agencies and the public	3.0	.88	MR
3	Tracking of outbreaks in different communities	3.1	.84	MR
4	Educating people on safety protocols	3.1	.83	MR
5	Building synergy between pharmacists and doctors in the quest to discover medical solutions to the virus	3.0	.82	MR
6	Dissemination of only credible news on the virus	2.9	.86	MR
7	Flagging of fake news about the pandemic	3.0	.87	MR
8	Designing information campaigns	2.9	.88	MR
9	Incorporating health messages into entertainment	3.1	.92	MR
10	Working in tandem with other organizations such as religious bodies and other NGOs	3.2	.94	MR
11	Promoting peer-to-peer health communication	3.0	.91	MR

Key: X = Mean, SD = Standard deviation MR = Media Role.

Table 3 shows 14 possible roles that the media could play in enhancing teenagers' awareness of COVID-19 and their adoption of the COVID-19 safety protocols. The Table shows that all the 11 role indicators have mean scores of

X> 2.50. This means that all the 11 items could be roles of the media in enhancing the teenagers' awareness of COVID-19 and their adoption of the protocols.

Discussion of Findings

The study revolved around the level of awareness of teenagers in Nsukka LGA about the COVID-19 pandemic, their attitude towards safety protocols outlined by health authorities and the role of the media towards enhancing the awareness level of teenagers about the coronavirus and their attitude towards adoption of safety protocols as outlined by health authorities. The findings from the study reveal that the teenagers have fairly high level of awareness about the causes of coronavirus, its symptoms as well as safety protocols outlined by the health authorities to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Being a novel virus COVID-19 has also resulted in considerable level of media exposure, as there is a need to keep people optimally informed about new discoveries about the characteristics of the virus as well as progress that is being made in discovering a sustainable cure for it. These are in line with the views of Amzat *et. al* (2000) who opined that exposure to media and information significantly improves the awareness and perception of individuals towards global events. Findings further show that teenagers in Nsukka LGA are also highly aware of the different safety protocols such as washing of hands, use of sanitizer, and physical distancing measures that are

outline by health authorities in order to combat the spread of the virus. These findings are in agreement with the views of Ohia, Bakare and Ahmad (2020) who mentioned that exposure to news media helps individuals to have informed and enlightened attitudes towards novel challenges, including health pandemics.

The findings from the study also show the different attitudes of teenagers towards the safety protocols that are outlined by government and health authorities. Results show that the respondents agree to some measures such as regular washing of hands, the use of hand sanitizer, adherence to physical distancing in gatherings and mandatory wearing of facemasks. Furthermore, respondents also agreed to the act of covering the mouth while sneezing or coughing, consciousness of loss of sense of taste and smell, avoidance of crowded indoor gatherings and close contact with persons affected with the virus. Results however showed that respondents disagreed with the adherence of some other safety protocol measures such as non-touching of the nose and mouth, the practice of 'no-touch' greeting and adherence to other national and state directives. These are in line with the position of Nwakpu, Ezema and Opusunju (2020) who mentioned that members of the population find it difficult to adhere to some safety protocol measures because they believe the conspiracy theories about the coronavirus being fake and that it

is a ploy for deceiving people and reduction of world population. These findings are also in agreement with the views of Opusunju, Akyuz and Inim (2020) who mentioned that avoidance of crowded gatherings, wearing of facemask and physical distancing have considerably increased as people look towards such measures as a means for limiting risk of contracting the virus. The authors further mentioned that increased fear due to increasing infection and death rates have driven people towards adopting these safety measures towards limiting risk of contracting the virus.

Findings from the study also show that the media plays a significant role towards influencing the adoption of safety protocols by teenagers in Nsukka LGA. The respondents strongly agreed that the media should always obtain and disseminate up to date information on the virus, track outbreaks in different communities and also educate as well as continually educate the public on safety protocols outlined by health authorities. Results also showed that respondents strongly agreed that the media should incorporate healthy messages into their regular entertainment programs. These are in tandem with the views of Smith and Adedejo (2017) who mentioned that due to the reliance of the public on the media for up to date information and entertainment, it exerts a key role in influencing desired behaviour on the populace. Findings from the study also show that the respondents agreed that the media facilitates communication between

medical researchers, public health experts, funding agencies and the general public on efforts as well as progress being made in getting sustainable cure for the virus and support systems to help economies and individuals cope with the challenges that have resulted from the pandemic. Findings further show that respondents agreed that the media ought to build a synergy between different categories of healthy experts in the pursuit of discovering a cure for the virus and educating the public about symptoms and safety protocols to be adopted. Furthermore, respondents agreed that the media should promptly flag fake news about the virus as well as disseminate only credible news about the pandemic. Respondents also agreed that the media should design information campaigns about the virus as well as promote peer to peer health communication to help the public keep abreast of new discoveries pertaining to the virus. These findings are in tandem with the views of Opusunju, Akyuz and Inim (2020) who mentioned that the media plays a key role in contributing to the development of the health sector of underdeveloped and developing economies by assisting healthcare experts to access valuable information as well as educating the public in tandem with the public on procedures and the benefits of "healthy living" practices.

Conclusion

The novel coronavirus significantly altered lifestyles, businesses, families, healthcare systems and almost every facet of human existence in the year 2020. It has led to significant adjustment to normal mode of human existence such as reduction of large gatherings, increased physical distancing amongst individuals and increased health consciousness amongst members of the population. Due to the novel nature of the virus, it has attracted significant media attention and this has served as a means for informing the public about the coronavirus as well as keeping the public updated on new discoveries about the virus characteristics, recovery rates, mortality rates and progress on the discovery of a sustainable antidote, thus significantly impacting on the awareness of the populace about the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, safety protocols outlined by health experts are aimed at containing the spread of the virus.

The attitude of individuals towards the safety protocols outlined by health authorities is influenced by their level of awareness about the virus. The attitude of teenagers significantly determines their adoption of teenagers towards adopting the safety protocols thus exerting a direct influence on the rate of spread of the virus. Furthermore, attitude and awareness of teenagers in Nsukka LGA towards the coronavirus helps in promoting the efforts made by the media in keeping them duly informed about

developments on the pandemic. Safety protocols are vital for checking the spread of the virus as efforts are still going on to find a cure for the virus. However, teenagers in Nsukka LGA do not agree to all the safety protocols promulgated by the government and health authorities, and this has been attributed to their misgivings about the necessity of such measures as well as their doubts about the veracity of the virus. This has thus made it imperative that the media disseminates only credible news and continually flags fake information in order to keep the public properly informed about the coronavirus pandemic.

Recommendations and Implications for Mass Media

Based on the results obtained in this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Media practitioners should conduct in-depth research before releasing content so as to disseminate credible information about the coronavirus to members of the populace.
2. Individual members of population, including teenagers, should strictly adhere to the safety protocols outlined by healthcare authorities at all times, as this will significantly help reduce the rate of spread.
3. Teenagers should be told to act based on factual and verifiable information about the pandemic and not based on unfounded opinions, as such actions could have adverse psychological, physical, mental and emotional effects on individuals.

4. Teenagers should use their exposure to the media to keep abreast with new information on medical efforts pertaining to the development of vaccines and antidote towards curing the virus.
5. Media firms should work in synergy with medical and government authorities in order to keep the public abreast with updates about the virus and development of antidotes to the virus.
6. Medical programs, especially those based on information about the coronavirus and the recommended safety protocols should be incorporated into the program timetable of media stations in order to inform a wide range of audience.
7. Information that is disseminated across by the media about the coronavirus should be obtained from the right sources and should be properly vetted in order to
8. The media should partner with other organizations such as religious organizations such as churches and mosques with the aim of educating people on the adoption of safety protocols.

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