

Influence of Corona Virus (COVID-19) Pandemic and Family Relationships among Affected Families in Makurdi Metropolis

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Abstract

This study focused on influence of corona virus (COVID-19) on family relationships in Markudi Metropolis. Specifically, it determined: ways family relationships were influenced during lock-down; expressed effects of lock-down on the family; and the challenges faced by families during lock-down. Research design was a descriptive survey. Area of the study was Makurdi metropolis. Population was made up of people who had fully recovered from COVID-19 in the area. Questionnaire was used for data collection. Data were analyzed using means. Result shows 12 ways family relationships were influenced during the lockdown, including that the family stayed together gladly; communication among members was improved, and so on. Other findings are 16 expressed effects of the COVID-19 lockdown on the family, including that children were bored, idle and sometimes restless; children's education was drastically affected, among others. Further findings are 15 challenges faced by families during the COVID-19 lockdown. These include, among others, providing care during the period was challenging, there was emotional trauma, parents faced uphill tasks of providing E-learning opportunities. Based on the findings it was recommended that government should become more proactive in its social welfare policies and relevant implementation. There should also be change in societal attitude to personal and community health matters.

Keywords: Family, Lockdown, Relationships, Contact-tracing, COVID-19, Pandemic.

Introduction

The world woke up to a global pandemic in the last quarter of the year 2019 and it seem initially like a foreign disease that might not get into Nigeria until in the first quarter of the year 2020, when the index case appeared and affected the 37 states of Nigeria including the Federal Capital

Territory(FCT). Families were confronted with new lifestyle changes of being locked down to stay safe and keep safe. At this stage, family relationship is crucial to family stability, harmony, development and peace. A family faced with crisis is bound to encounter some challenges. Family challenges occur in several

ways, socially, economically, physically and health wise. The family are the epicenter of the society and its' members are interconnected in several relationships in the family that is both conjugal and consanguine. This makes the family a large group of individuals who stay together and have shared identity, shelter, values and goals in the society. That makes the family the foundation and nucleus of the society, therefore, the lives of family members are most affected in times of crisis and challenges.

A crisis situation is a stressful time in an individual's life when they experience a breakdown or disruption in the normal or daily activities of the family function. Family crisis as a turning point that upsets the normal functioning of the family and requires a new set of responses to the stressor. Any crisis is a blow to the family and all members are affected collectively, even when it is one individual that is involved such as in ill health, however, all members of the family are affected in one way or another when the family is faced in any form of challenges or crisis. Crisis situations include ill health, death of spouse, natural disasters such as flooding, wildfires, tsunamis, volcanoes, pests on farming plantations, drought, and all other disruptions that can affect the family.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a corona-virus disease 2019 caused by acute respiratory syndrome ((SARS-COV 2). The first index confirmed case in Nigeria was announced in February 2020. Shortly after that, the spread to all parts of the 36 states of the

federation of Nigeria including Abuja. Families were confronted with new lifestyle changes of being locked down to stay safe and keep safe. There were several measures that were put in place by the National Centre for Disease Control (NDCD), which was charged with the function to prevent, detect and control diseases of public health importance, especially in coordinating states in responding to small outbreaks and lead the response to large disease outbreaks. At the time of this study, Benue state seems to be amongst the lowest state hit by the virus with one thousand, one hundred and eighty eight (1,188) cases, most have been discharged and with twenty two (22) deaths, the highest being Lagos state with fifty eight thousand, three hundred and sixty seven (58,367) cases and four hundred and thirty nine (439) deaths, however, the measures concerning all the protocols set up by the NCDC cuts across all the states of the Federation irrespective of the number of cases and deaths recorded.

COVID-19 affects different people in different ways. Most infected people will develop mild to moderate illness. Serious symptoms include difficulty in breathing, or shortness of breath, chest pain or pressure, loss of speech and movement, (NCDC,2020). The most common symptoms are fever, dry cough and tiredness. On average, it takes 5-6 days from when one is infected for the symptoms to show and up to 14 days of serious ill health. The symptoms of COVID-19 have been misconstrued variously to mean fevers, malaria, cough, high blood

pressure and the like. In any way, being sick by any member of the family can be a challenge especially in a lockdown, every member of the family is affected. There is a great deal of speculations and uncertainty about how the pandemic will unfold and the response to it over time. It is this uncertainty as to the duration that the virus will stay with humanity that makes it worrisome.

The measures set up by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC, 2020) includes but not limited to the following: One is expected to stay at home in a well ventilated room away from other people such as family members with separate toilet and hygiene facilities; while working from home for those who are not adversely affected, it is important to ensure that the necessary communication facilities such as the mobile phones are ready to communicate with other members of the family. Self-isolation also requires everyone has adequate food, water, hygiene provisions and appropriate medical treatment for any medical conditions. Furthermore, wash the hands regularly with water and soap or the use of an alcohol based hand rub, it is necessary to cover the nose and mouth with disposal tissue when coughing and sneezing, clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces such as door knobs, tables, bed frames and other bedroom furniture daily with regular household disinfectant or soap.

The most important emphasis that has been placed on the people since the outbreak of the COVID-19

pandemic is the lock-down and remain at home strategy for control of the spread. According to Gromada, Richardson & Rees (2020), lock-down has shown negative and positive consequences for families. In some families, violence has increased, especially against women and girls. Increased acts of violence occur as lockdown keep victims inside with their abusers, most affected is women and girls. This affects family relationship negatively.

United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA, 2020) revealed that the economic and physical disruption caused by the disease has vast consequences for the health of the family members. For example, the consequent on childcare is critical as the closures or lock-down has exposed a deeper crisis for families of young children in the low- and middle-income category. Childcare is essential in providing children with services such as affection, protection, stimulation, nutrition and at the same time enable them develop social, emotional and cognitive skills. Furthermore, the lock-down has affected the economy of most families. Many businesses have closed, staff have been downsized and even some people have lost their jobs as a result of the lock-down. This is generally a challenge to family relationship.

On the positive side, the lockdown has helped the solidarity of family members. Pearlin (1999) has shown that lockdowns help members of the family to eat together, stay together, spend maximum time physically

witnessing each other's pain and pleasure. The impact of COVID-19 on family relationships depends upon the strength of the family bond, which depends on the individual strength. Family relationships play a central role in shaping an individual wellbeing across the life course. Wellbeing is generally seen in the dimension of general happiness, life satisfaction and good mental and physical health, (Merz, Consedine, Schulze and Schuengel, 2009).

The quality of family relationships including social support (providing love, advice and care) and strain (argument, being critical, making too many demands) can influence wellbeing through psychosocial, behavioral and physiological pathways. Those receiving support from their family members may feel a greater sense of self-worth and this enhanced self-esteem may be a psychological resource and eventually promotes positive effect and better mental health. Family members may also regulate each other's behavior (social support) and provide information and encouragement to behave in healthier ways and more effectively utilize health care services (Reczek, Thomer, Lodge, Umberson and Underhill (2014). According to the family stress theory, stress is the periodic, acute events that happen to all families and stress is a disruption to the daily routines of the family and it also affects the family sense of security (Merz, Consedine, Schulze and Schuengel, 2009). So, the social stress theory represents a change in the

family's steady state and is the response of the family to demands experienced as a result of a stressor event. Covid19 has been listed as an ailment that is stressful to the family; it has not only caused health challenges but has brought certain economic and social changes to the family affecting routines.

COVID-19 seems to come to stay in the world, since it seems there are no ready cure for the virus. Some countries have continued to speculate the vaccines that may be available in 2021 or thereafter, meanwhile, families are infected, and the figures continue to go up and down in both the number infected, number discharged and number deaths. This is worrisome and family relationship is important as people continue to be advised to stay indoors and keep to the distance rule. It has also come to the point that schools are being advised to conduct online teaching and people to work from home. There are bound to be some adjustments in such drastic requirement and changes in the family setting that is expected. This study is therefore, conducted to find out family relationships in the Lock-down and the challenges during this period of COVID-19.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective was to investigate the Influence of COVID-19 and family relationship among affected families in Makurdi metropolis. Specifically, the study determined the following objectives:

1. ways family relationships were influenced by lock- down among families in Makurdi metropolis
2. expressed effects of lock-down on the families in Makurdi metropolis
3. challenges faced by the families during the lock- down in Makurdi metropolis

Methodology

Design of the Study. The descriptive survey research design was used to collect all the relevant data for the study. This is more appropriate because it will describe exactly what it is based on the objectives using a small sample upon which generalization can be made. Most researches in the social sciences find the descriptive research design appropriate.

Area of the Study. Benue state is in the middle of Nigeria and an intersecting state between all the states in the federation from the North and to the South. People travel in and out of the state on a regular and daily basis because of the abundant resources available in the state, therefore it is an attraction for commerce and businesspeople. It is one of the states affected by COVID-19 and has implemented all the protocols of being completely under lockdown over a period of time.

Population of the Study. Benue State has at the time of the study, one thousand, one hundred and eighty-eight cases, (1,188) cases of COVID-19 and 22 deaths. The population was carefully selected from people who have fully recovered from COVID-19.

Sample for the Study. Only 30 respondents who were identified through trace contact formed the sample of the study. The names were mentioned by Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and were made public in Benue state before they were sent on self- isolation in designated hospitals and /or stay at home. Only respondents who engaged in self isolation at home were used for this study.

Instrument for data collection. The instrument of the study was a structured questionnaire titled the family relationship questionnaire (FRQ) and composed of 45 items in a 5- point Likert scale of preference. The instrument was graduated from 5-1, with strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Mildly Agree (3), Disagree (2) and strongly disagree (1). A mean score of 3.00 was the agreeable mean; therefore any mean less than 3.00 was not agreeable. The instrument was validated by 2 medical personnel who were involved in providing home care monitoring of patients who were on self-isolation at home and an expert Home Economist in family and child development. All irrelevant and ambiguous items were removed to make the instrument suitable for data collection.

Method of data collection. A form soliciting willingness to participate in the study under strict confidentiality was sought from all those who participating in the study. Two research assistants who are staff of the NCDC were used to collect information from the identified

location of the respondents, since they were directly involved in routine checkup of these patients. The study covered a period of two weeks.

Data Analysis Techniques: The data was analyzed using simple

percentages and means. The result was presented on Tables 1-3.

Findings of the Study

Findings of the study presented on Tables 1-3.

Table1: Mean Responses on Ways Family Relationships were Influence by COVID-19 Lock-down in Makurdi Metropolis.

S/N	Ways Family Relationships were Influenced	\bar{X}	Decision
1.	The family stayed together gladly	3.40	Agree
2.	The family worked together as a team to overcome COVID-19	4.00	Agree
3.	Improved spousal relationship	4.20	Agree
4.	Parent-children relationship seem to be better	4.60	Agree
5.	Siblings come to better understanding of one another	4.10	Agree
6.	Communication was improved among family members	4.20	Agree
7.	There were more family arguments and conflict	2.40	Disagree
8.	Better time, financial and energy management	3.50	Agree
9.	Incidence of infighting and violence reported	2.90	Agree
10.	Increased incidence of separation	2.60	Agree
11.	There was negative family social relationship	2.00	Disagree
12.	There were major family changes in recreation, feeding and parenting patterns	3.80	Agree
13.	The family bonded together	4.00	Agree
14.	The family disagreed on so many issues	2.80	Agree

Table 1 shows that fourteen (14) items were listed on Table 1, 12 items indicate ways COVID-19 influence family relationships, while 2 items disagree on the possibility of family conflicts, arguments and negative social relationship. This has implication for the general findings that the lockdown has increased the incidence of domestic abuse.

Table 2: Mean Responses of Expressed Effect of the COVID-19 Lockdown on Families in Makurdi Metropolis

S/N	Expressed Effects of Lockdown on Families	\bar{X}	Decision
1	Children were bored, idle and sometimes restless during the lockdown	3.70	Agree
2	Parents had time to hear, talk, work, cook, play and assist children in activities	4.40	Agree
3	Having children at home all day helped in socialization practices	4.20	Agree
4	Adolescents spent more time on TV/internet/social media	4.20	Agree
5	Lockdown ensured most parents fulfill their responsibility	4.00	Agree

	on socialization		
6	Covid-19 lock down increased anti-social behavior of adolescents such as robbery, drug abuse illegal sexual activities	3.20	Agree
7	Families experience more siblings conflict during COVID-19 lockdown	3.00	Agree
8	COVID-19 lockdown brought about financial losses in business	4.40	Agree
9	Children education have been drastically affected by COVID-19 lockdown especially in areas where there are no online learning facilities	4.40	Agree
10	Daily nutritional requirement of household is adversely affected by COVID-19 lockdown results to dwindling resources	4.40	Agree
11	More business opportunities were identified and pursued	4.10	Agree
12	Families experience an increase in mental health challenges, domestic violence and child maltreatment	3.30	Agree
13	Lack of peer contact increase anxiety, frustration and feeling of helplessness	4.10	Agree
14	Marital and family adjustments were necessary	4.11	Agree
15	Its impact on the level of preparedness on budgeting and planning	4.11	Agree
16	The family had more unplanned time to manage	4.00	Agree

Table 2 shows result showed expressed effect of COVID-19 lockdown on the family. Sixteen (16) items were listed. All 16 items showed expressed effect of the lockdown on families. Specifically, families expressed increase in mental health challenges, child maltreatment and domestic violence, (3.30). There was also an increase in anti-social behavior of adolescents with a mean of 3.20.

Table 3: Mean Responses of Challenges Faced by Families during COVID-19 Lockdown

S/N	Challenges Faces by Families During Lockdown	\bar{X}	Decision
1	Families were completely unprepared for the COVID-19 lockdown	3.50	Agree
2	Families were separated during the COVID-19 lockdown	3.60	Agree
3	Loss of loved ones were experienced leading to double tragedy	4.40	Agree
4	Providing care during the period was challenging	3.60	Agree
5	Wrong perception about the means of transmission of the virus	4.00	Agree
6	Parents had difficulty in providing daily basic needs of family members	4.00	Agree
7	Many parents may have their means of livelihood threatened	4.40	Agree

8	Home schooling program was quite a challenge for parents of young children	4.70	Agree
<i>Table 3 Contuned</i>			
9	Parents faced uphill tasks of providing E-Learning opportunities and controlling the activities of children on the internet	4.56	Agree
10	COVID-19 lockdown caused reduction in mobility	4.20	Agree
11	Emotional trauma	4.50	Agree
12	There is difficulty in contact tracing and increase in the number of new cases	4.50	Agree
13	Stigmatization of people infected with COVID-19 and poor response to treatment is a challenge	4.50	Agree
14	The symptom of severe headache, loss of appetite, causing high body temperature and incapacitation during ill health is a challenge	4.10	Agree
15	Families exhausted their life savings during the lockdown	3.40	Agree

Table 3 shows challenges faced by families during the COVID-19 lockdown. 15 items were listed, and all items ranged from 3.50 – 4.70 above the cut off mean. Unpreparedness of families to the physical, social and economic effect of the lockdown, loss of loved ones, threat of loss of jobs and parents uphill challenge of providing e-learning opportunities are some of these challenges.

Discussion

For a number of families, the impact of COVID-19 came as a surprise. When it started in China Wuhan precisely, it seems to be far off, until it dawned on Nigerians that COVID-19 has found its way into the country. Gradually the whole world has been affected and COVID-19 has influenced the way of life of peoples. Result on table one shows responses on ways family relationships were influenced during the lockdown in Makurdi metropolis.

Fourteen (14) items were listed on this table, 12 items were agreed upon as having influence on family relationships, while only 2 disagree as not having influence on family relationships. Significant to the result are the following items: Improved spousal and parent -children's relationships (4.20 and 4.60) respectively, better time and financial management (3.50), and major family changes in recreation, feeding and parenting patterns were also reported. According to Gromada et al (2020), in the current context of COVID-19, schools were closed, businesses were closed, and families stayed together in an inclusive and enclosed environment. This requires some major changes in lifestyles and family adjustment. The result of this study showed some positive improvement in spousal communication, family recreation, feeding and parenting patterns. This is contrary to United

Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA, 2020) report which revealed that even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the situation of families has been described as a “global crisis”. For example, there are cases of family conflicts and disintegration.

Furthermore, United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA, 2020) revealed a severe toll of COVID-19 on sexual and reproductive health rights. Accordingly, there are widespread losses in access to sexual and reproductive health information and services and increased concerns over gender-based violence. UNICEF (2020) also envisages a situation of increase violence against women and children, harsh child discipline and child labor as issues confronting families in a lockdown situation. Most worrisome is the fact the victims and the abusers are found in an enclosed environment for some time without respite. Nevertheless, the positive influence of COVID-19 was also brought out in the findings of this study and these goes a long way to support family relationship amidst the several deaths that involved the death of loved ones and in some cases, the death of the bread winner of the family with consequential implications for the future in regard to family survival and sustainability.

According to Ejeabukwa & Ezema (2015), parents had always complained of striking a balance between family responsibilities and work which has affected quality time spent at home, however with the lock down, parents have ample time to stay at home and

interact more gainfully with the children as families. This gives parents the emotional support to work as a team to overcome the virus infection. This is a positive influence of COVID-19 on family relationships.

Table 2 shows result of the expressed effect of COVID-19 lockdown on the family. Sixteen (16) items were listed. 13 items show positive effect of Covid-19 lockdown with the mean scores ranging from 3.70 – 4.50. 3 items were rejected, indicating that families experience an increase in mental health challenges, child maltreatment and domestic violence. There was also an increase in anti-social behavior of adolescents. According to Reczek et al (2014), the stress of relationship can result in physiological processes that impair immune function, affect the cardiovascular system and increase the risk of depression, whereas positive relationships are associated with lower wear and tear of the body. Stressors and social support are core components of the stress process theory, (Pearlin,1999). Stress can undermine mental health while social support can serve as a protective resource. Mental health challenges promote anger, anxiety, tension, insecurity, frustration and feeling of hopelessness which can lead to a breakdown of family relationship.

Furthermore, since the onset of Covid-19 pandemic, 99% of the world’s 2.3bn children, that is about, 60% are in some form of lockdown. This affects the traditional ways of going to school and work, this poses a

challenge to parents. Childcare is now seen as a challenge, because families are seeking financial support from government and other employers in the form of palliatives, financial support and some even liquidizing their savings to cushion the effect of the pandemic to safeguard their children's learning and development, (UNICEF, 2020).

Recently, government has provided COVID-19 recovery packages. The COVID-19 vaccinations such as the AstraZeneca, Johnson and Johnson, is available but limited to specific populations. This can be changed if public provision of childcare, subsidies, social protection and incentives are targeted at the most affected. Ruth, Kayleigh & Maddy (2020), states that families with dependent children are more likely to be adversely affected by the financial, emotional and physical implication of COVID-19 lockdown.

Another aspect of the lockdown that calls for concern is the use of the internet especially by adolescents', University students and internet learning by children. Before now, the effect of internet abuse and online surfing has been abused by young adults, however, Children education has continued in some private schools who have institutionalize online learning; and children are kept busy with their educational work and development. In as much as this is an innovative strategy, there seems to be a greater use of mobile phones, long period on the TV and use of the internet by students, whose schools

especially the public Universities have not made provisions for online teaching and learning. Alabi (2019) stated that in Nigeria, the internet will soon revolutionize many aspects of home and family life. Access to social media at home as long as there is network connectivity has increased the level of information available especially concerning the pandemic. Kembe&Ifejika(2013), noted that the unguided use of the internet especially by adolescents has contributed to the level of social vices being experienced leading to unhealthy family relationships. Parents have expressed concern on the number of hours adolescents spend on the use of their phones browsing the internet world.

Result on Table 3 shows the challenges faced by families during the COVID-19 lockdown. 15 items were listed, and all items ranged from 3.50 – 4.70 above the cut off mean. Unpreparedness of families to the physical, social and economic effect of the lockdown, loss of loved ones, threat of loss of jobs and parents uphill challenge of providing e-learning opportunities are some of these challenges mentioned during the COVID-19 lockdown. For a number of families, the lockdown could mean making changes in everyday routines especially as it affects finance, for other, it could mean anxiety in children, tension in parenting, relationships and other fears.

COVID-19 seems to be a new pandemic to the non-medical world; many people had little or no knowledge about the virus. The family

seems to be unprepared for the complete lockdown and restrictions placed on movement and its consequent effect. Isolation centers where only available for the infected but many people had home care remedies and where avoiding stigmatization associated with the news that one is infected. Loss of loved ones as a result of the pandemic caused shock and emotional instability and this is in line with Awo (2015) who noted that families in crisis situation may experience trauma and various forms of pressures and challenges. Therefore, the relationship within the family is critical to wellbeing during crisis. Family relationships are enduring and consequential for the wellbeing across the life course and it is important for intergenerational and sibling ties to be enhanced in the course of any crisis.

Conclusion

COVID-19 pandemic is a global and national crisis situation that has influenced and impacted the world community. Before now, not much is known about this dreaded pandemic as such it took the world by surprise at the level of the devastation leading to deaths of many people around the world. Most critical are the protocols for safety that has been attached to the disease to keep families safe, keeping social distance, staying indoors and the use of the face mask among others. These protocols were established by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control and have implication for family relationship during the lockdown

period. The conclusion reached by the findings of this study shows that the lockdown has positive and negative influence on it.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and this conclusion, the following recommendations were made.

1. Government involvement in provision of social security packages for the family. In as much as the government seems to be showing some level of meeting the COVID-19 challenge up front, there is need for a social security policy by the government which is critical to families meeting their daily and family needs during any lockdown period. Government can involve the private sector in a coordinated strategy of providing the social welfare of the populace. The social welfare packages could be in the form of educational, food and recreational, housing and transport palliatives during such periods.
2. Role of the Family. Family relationships are critical at any period of time especially during family crisis. The success of any family is being threatened during such period of family challenge; therefore, support, empathy, understanding and provision by family members are able to forestall adverse effect of a lockdown.

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