

## CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID-19) SPREAD AS CONSEQUENCES OF MYTHS AND LIFESTYLES IN NIGERIA: WHICH WAY OUT?

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### Abstract

*The study examined COVID-19 spread as consequences of myths and lifestyles as well as the ways out of same in Nigeria. In doing so, it explained what coronavirus is, along with the consequences of myths and lifestyles in the spread of the virus in Nigeria. In order to interrogate the foregoing, Health Belief Model (HBM) was used to triangulate myths and lifestyles as consequences of the disease spread in Nigeria. With regard to overcoming these challenges, the study proffered ways out, which include among others that the Federal Government should, through its traditional and social media outlets as well as traditional medium of communication (by the use of town crier, house-to-house messages, town hall spaced meetings, etc.) inform, educate and communicate with the public on the volcanic dangers of COVID-19, and why certain myths such that the virus is caused by 5G technology, it is a way to exploit Nigerians financially, and also an international politics to destroy the economy of Nigeria should be discouraged.*

*Keywords: COVID-19 Spread, Consequences, Myths, Lifestyles.*

### Introduction

There is no gainsaying the fact that coronavirus is the most dreadful virus in the world today. Curbing the virus has posed challenges to medical scientists, due to its chemistry and complexity to manage complications of same in humans. This fact is not farfetched, since coronavirus is spherical or pleomorphic enveloped particles containing single-stranded (positive-sense) ribonucleic acid (RNA) associated with a nucleoprotein within a capsid comprised of matrix protein (Tyrrel and Myint, 1996). The virus emerged in Wuhan in China; its chemistry can destroy the human immunity, especially those with cardiovascular diseases along with the aged whose immunity is weak.

Worse still, the virus can infect animals and it is capable of animal to human transmission (zoonotic) in a rapid volcanic nature. It is this zoonotic volcanic spread of the virus and its lethality that surprised China, and indeed other nations the world over; hence the difficulty in its containment. Today, the developed nations are improving on the containment of the coronavirus and COVID-19 by downplaying myths and encouraging appropriate lifestyles.

Unfortunately, there are still problems of myths and lifestyles to contend with in Nigeria, in spite of the wide information of the reality of the COVID-19 in the world. It is therefore in these circumstances that the study posited precise objectives, which include to explain what coronavirus is, and to review and ascertain the consequences of myths and lifestyles in the continuous spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria as well as to proffer ways out of same in Nigeria.

## Literature Review

### Conceptual Framework

#### What is Coronavirus?

According to Stoppler (2020), coronavirus is a type of common virus that affects humans, typically leading to an upper respiratory infection (URI). In view of this, coronavirus is largely a virus that causes respiratory infections that not only affects the coronary, but also affects other parts of organs (heart and lungs) of the body negatively, which may result to death of the infected persons. Again, after the outbreaks of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003 and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome- Coronavirus (MERS-COV), reported first in Saudi Arabia in 2012), a similar virus is discovered in China known as coronavirus. Thus, it is this virus that gave rise to COVID-19 which unfortunately is threatening the world's existence today. In keeping with these facts there are certain things we need to know about COVID-19, and they include that:

- i. COVID-19 is the disease caused by a new coronavirus that emerged in China in December, 2019.
- ii. COVID-19 symptoms include cough, fever, shortness of breath, muscle aches, sore throat, unexplained loss of taste or smell, diarrhoea and headache. COVID-19 can be severe, and in some cases have caused death.
- iii. The new coronavirus can be spread from person to person. It is diagnosed with a laboratory test.
- iv. There is no coronavirus vaccine yet. Prevention involves frequent hand-washing, coughing into the bend of your elbow, staying home when you are sick and wearing a cloth face covering if you cannot practice physical distancing (Sauer, 2020).

Apart from COVID -19, there are other coronaviruses in the world with similar origin and complications in the human body. The unique features of coronaviruses include that:

- i. Coronaviruses are common in different animals. Rarely, can an animal coronavirus infect humans.
- ii. There are many different kinds of coronaviruses. Some of them can cause colds or other mild respiratory (nose, throat, lung, etc) illnesses.
- iii. Other coronaviruses can cause more serious diseases, including SARS and MERS.
- iv. Coronaviruses are named for their appearance: under the microscope, the viruses look like they are covered with pointed structures that surround them like the corona, or crown (Sauer, 2020).

#### COVID-19 Spread as a Consequence of Myths in Nigeria

First and foremost, myths are stories told by people about people: where they come from, how they handle major disasters, how they cope with what they must and how everything will end (Gill, 2019). In line with Gill's (2019) definition, *Typhoon Media Corporation* (2020) defines a myth as a story, presented as historical dealing with the cosmological and supernatural traditions of a people, their gods, culture, heroes, religious beliefs, etc.

With regard to these definitions, myths are associated with human existence and activities or acts within the human ecology. Myths also can be typified into religious myth, cultural myth, health myth, environmental myth, political myth, nutritional myth, etc in Nigeria. In other words, people have myths about their origin, gods and goddesses they worship, what

they eat and pattern of treatment of ailments as well as prevention and control of same in Nigeria. This is a fact of the myths that are associated with COVID-19; hence Nigerians today have different beliefs or misconceptions of the spread of the disease in Nigeria.

In view of the foregoing stance, the myths that are responsible for the COVID-19 spread in Nigeria include the following:

#### **COVID-19 is as a result of 5G network**

Some Nigerians believe that COVID-19 is not actually a virus, but a network technology that became faulty causing deaths in Nigeria, and largely in the world. For Nigerians, it all started in China when Huawei installed 5G network (the fifth generation technology standard for cellular networks developed in 2019) in Wuhan's Huoshenshan hospital with the aim of achieving digital services. Some Nigerians believe that, instead of achieving the foregoing, the technology exposed people to radiation that is today referred to as COVID-19. The belief is that the countries that accepted the technology are today facing the radiation challenges from 5G installations. These countries include United States of America (USA), Russia, Germany, Spain, Italy, United Kingdom (UK), Brazil among others are experiencing high levels of death toll, due to high radiation that arose from 5G technology.

Interrogating this mythological argument, the question is, why were Nigerians affected by the COVID-19 claimed radiation, when there was no installation of 5G network in Nigeria? Nigerians however, believe that those who were sick and died, were not as a result of coronavirus, rather were those who died, due to '5G virus' technology radiation contact with those affected by same. Sadly, as some Nigerians are holding onto this myth, there has been a serious spread in COVID-19 in Nigeria today; and this is an unfortunate situation for health professionals in prevention and control of community-to-community transmission of same.

#### **COVID-19 is a deliberate attempt to exploit Nigeria financially through the sale of trial drugs/vaccines and medical equipment**

Some Nigerians believe that the aim of China and her allied nations is that they sprang up a virus killer that is ravaging the world today with all intents and purposes to sell their trial drugs/vaccines and medical equipment. Thus, Nigeria being in precarious stance of not producing any vaccine or manufacturing medical equipment to manage the disease outbreak is worst hit in West Africa. In this regard, it is believed that Nigeria has no option, but to depend on China, Germany, USA, Russia and other developed nations on trial drugs/vaccines, medical equipment and in some cases medical experts, thereby exporting her capital to these nations.

In the circumstances of the foregoing, some Nigerians believe that the outbreak of COVID-19 is a pseudo-virus outbreak; hence the hurry for international support from Chinese government among others. Thus, as some Nigerians are engrossed in this myth, COVID-19 spread curve shows that there is startling community-to-community spread of the virus that needs to be urgently curbed, since early morning safety actions will make the day (healthy day) in Nigeria.

#### **COVID-19 is tagged 'no cure' yet patients with the disease were recuperated and discharged**

In Nigeria, there is also a believe that COVID-19 does not exist, in that if it does exist patients will not be discharged from both isolation centres and hospitals. What is worse of the myth is the fact that some who were discharged from hospitals were not treated with vaccines.

For some Nigerians, the question is if there is 'no cure' what vaccines or drugs did the medical doctors use to treat those who showed symptoms of coronavirus? To answer this question, medical doctors used immune booster drugs and fruits to treat patients (especially those who do not have cardiovascular diseases and other related lungs diseases as well as low immunity), in addition to chemotherapy (use of hydroxychloroquine) on them. In spite of these facts, some Nigerians are still engulfed in the myths of non-treatment of COVID-19; hence the claim of non-availability of the disease in Nigeria.

The dilemma involved in this myth is the fact that Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and the Presidential Task Force (PTF) for COVID-19 have not deeply explained immune boosters or nutritional foods, along with exercises required to recuperate patients, and why subsequent adherence to same by not only those being treated or discharged, but also those without the disease. By this, both the vulnerable and non-vulnerable to COVID-19 will be predisposed to live in the conclave of misconceptions and myths about the disease or fools' paradise from which has continuously sparked the spread of same in Nigeria. Until this is addressed, this myth will continue to aggravate the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria.

### **COVID-19 is an international politics to destroy the economies of developing nations like Nigeria**

Some Nigerians have the myth that COVID-19 is a deliberate act by China and her collaborating nations to destroy the economies of developing nations, which will help them resist recession and pass its bulk to countries like Nigeria and other economic dependent countries in Africa. By this action, Nigeria as an import dependent country will depend on loan from international organizations (World Bank [WB], International Monetary Fund [IMF], Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], Mpower Financing and others) and donations from countries like China, USA, Germany, UK, etc. to service the economic downturn or near recession that arose from COVID-19- international politics. What is worse of this myth is the fact that it is making some Nigerians docile; hence they are not thinking out of the box in the prevention and control of the spread of coronavirus in Nigeria. Truly, this is dangerous, considering the earlier rising graph curve of the virus in Nigeria.

### **COVID-19 is a sign of the end of the world, and can only be treated through prayers and spiritual healing**

Nigerians who are more religious believe that COVID-19 is a sign of the end of the world and that more pestilence will come paving way for the actual end of the world. For now, some Nigerians (faith believers) see prayers and spiritual healing techniques as ways of halting the spread of COVID-19, rather than medical measure protocols proffered in the prevention and control of the spread of the virus in Nigeria. Regrettably, this myth has inculcated in the religious faith believers the non-compliance attitudes to protocols of the prevention and control of coronavirus; instead they depend on their religious faith for same.

The worse of this is the fact that some religious leaders are already canvassing for faith healing of COVID-19 rather than preaching and advising their members to adhere to preventive measures against the spread of the virus in Nigeria. Today, members of some religious organizations see faith as a way out of COVID-19; in the circumstance, exposing their members to getting COVID-19, thereby making them the springboards of the spread of same in Nigeria.

### **COVID-19 is an internal politics to make money in Nigeria**

Some Nigerians believe that governors are exaggerating the number of people with first contact of COVID-19 in order to get grants from the Federal Government. This is the reason most illiterate Nigerians insist that the startling figures of COVID-19 patients in the first quarter of 2020 in states were as a result of the monetary and palliative benefits they intend to get from monies donated by International Community to the Federal Government of Nigeria.

Today, this scenario of the spread of the virus is worsening since some Nigerians also believe that physicians now declare patients with related symptoms to have got the virus in order to earn Federal Government's approved allowances for same. This myth is really worrisome because it will make patients lose hope on medical care, besides poisoning the minds of Nigerians that COVID-19 is fake and therefore, cannot spread in Nigeria.

### **COVID-19 Spread as a Consequence of Lifestyles in Nigeria**

With regard to the continuous incident rate of people with COVID-19, the following lifestyles are delineated as indicators of the spread of the virus:

#### **Some Nigerians have continuously indulged in extramarital and unmarried partnership (single partner) intercourse**

Regrettably many Nigerians still indulge in extramarital sexual intercourse, in spite of the emergence of COVID-19. Worse still is the fact that some Nigerians believe that the coronavirus does not exist, and thus can indulge in sexual intercourse with their partners without condoms. In fact, they go to hotels secretly to do their unholy act with young girls, and in some cases married women.

Apart from the married men, young girls and single men also indulge in sexual intercourse with their female counterparts with the aim to satisfy their sexual desire without taken into cognizance the incident rate of COVID-19 in Nigeria. In view of these lifestyles among Nigerians, it is crystal clear that there will be continuous rise in COVID-19 if urgent measures are not taken to curb same in Nigeria.

#### **Some Nigerians have continuously indulged in social gathering for meetings and ceremonies**

Today in Nigeria, the unfortunate springboard for the spread of COVID-19 is that people are still gathering for meetings without considering COVID-19 protocols. In addition to this, people still hug and talk closely without considering at least two metres physical distancing. These acts are more in family meetings, youth meetings, opinion leaders meetings and chiefs-in-council meetings in Nigeria.

Apart from this, Nigerians still hold ceremonies like child dedication, marriage ceremonies, burial ceremonies, etc., in spite of the caution to avoid such ceremonies at this delicate period of COVID-19 spread in Nigeria. Thus, because of Nigerians' penchant for celebration, they resist government's protocols on ceremonies, and do same without considering the health risks of coronavirus spread in Nigeria. In fact, it is owing to this attitude of not being cautious in prevention of the spread of coronavirus that Nigerians are experiencing daily occurrence of same.

#### **Some Nigerians have continuously indulged in group eating and drinking, along with boarding of vehicles, in spite of startling rate of COVID-19**

With regard to the cultural activities in Nigeria, most Nigerians in traditional meetings drink from the same cup as mark of love and unity (Iwhuruohna people, Hausa people, Yorubas, Ijaws and the Ibos), in spite of the risk of getting COVID-19. What is worse is the fact that among the Hausa people and some parts of Yoruba, people still indulge in religious-cultural practices of group eating and drinking, group dances, etc., which can predispose them to getting COVID-19 in Nigeria. These religious-cultural activities are worrisome, especially among religious organizations in Nigeria. For instance, the Catholic and other Churches eat bread and drink from the same cup during the ritual of Holy Communion, while the Muslims share kettles for washing of their faces, alongside share mats for worshipping and sleeping in the mosque regardless of the existence of COVID-19 in Nigeria.

Additionally, Nigerians have unrepentantly continued to board vehicles in group without considering physical distancing protocols that will help halt the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria. Today, this break in protocols is a major cause of the spread of COVID-19; therefore, it is necessary to closely check this lifestyle, in order to halt same in Nigeria.

### **Some Nigerians have continuously refused to use face masks and sanitizers**

The lifestyle of not using nose and mouth shields, face masks and even non-compliance with regular hand washing at this period of COVID-19 is the worst form of lifestyle exhibited by some Nigerians. The unfortunate situation is the fact that most public places such as markets, supermarkets, departmental stores, etc. do not have hand-wash-points and sanitizers for their customers. In the circumstances of this lifestyle, Nigerians are predisposed to the maze of COVID-19 spread, for which if nothing is done urgently; the country will be battling with wildfire spread of the virus in the near future.

### **Some Nigerians have continuously indulged in self-medication**

Self-medication is one of the major causes of morbidity and mortality of COVID-19 in Nigeria. Nigerians who self-medicate for the care of ailments often are predisposed to other ailments and even complications of the existing ones. Drawing from this fact, some Nigerians who were suspected to have COVID-19 did not go for tests because of the phobia of being stigmatized. In the view of the foregoing, some Nigerians who have COVID-19 go for self-medication, in which when they eventually come in contact with others (healthy Nigerians) may predispose them to further spread of the virus. Truly, this negative lifestyle is a major cause of community-to-community spread of the coronavirus which has resulted to issues of person-to-person contact tracing (those who had contact with persons with COVID-19) and those who have died of same in Nigeria. Thus, to avert this ugly trend, one should know that 'one's action in the morning makes one's day'; and so the change of negative lifestyles is paramount now to free Nigerians from COVID-19 in the future.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **HBM: A Synoptic Triangulation of Myths and Lifestyles as Consequence of COVID-19 Spread in Nigeria**

HBM was developed in the early 1950s and was propounded by social psychologists among who was Hochbaum, Rosenstock. In line with *Rural Health Information Hub (RHIH)* (2020), HBM is a theoretical model that can be used to guide health promotion and disease prevention programmes. Apart from this, HBM is used to explain and predict individual changes in health behaviours (RHIH, 2020). In this instance, the model depicts that people's willingness

to change their health behaviours is based on their perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, perceived benefits, perceived barriers, cues to action, self-efficacy and insights of modifying variables.

Furthermore, the four key constructs of the health belief model are identified as perceived susceptibility and perceived severity (two dimensions of “threat” and perceived “net benefits”) (Glanz, 2001). Also, there is perceived barriers which is referred to as obstacles or impediments that restrict a person’s action or behaviour to achieve health or well-being. These barriers may be in terms of cost, or side effects of drugs, or myths, or unpleasant behaviour in the management of health.

Apart from this, HBM also covers the cue to action in which stimulus is needed to spur individual’s action or behaviour for healthy living which may either be by internal (innate drive) or external (advice from significant and generalized others) forces in the society, and self-efficacy which deals with individual confidence building to withstand capacity to perform healthy behaviour or act out in high confidence to achieve health enhancing behaviours such as exercise, eating right foods, avoid unsafe sexual intercourse, keeping environment safe, etc in order to lead a healthy lifestyle in the society. Additionally, HBM further covers demographic variables such as sex, age, race and ethnicity and socio-psychological variables such as social class, peer and reference group pressure that portray how people behave to live healthy in the society.

There are four major criticisms of the HBM: first, there is no evidence that attitudes and beliefs actually cause behaviours; second, the HBM appears to work well only if all other factors affecting the taking of preventive action are equal; third, while the HBM has been successful in predicting preventive health behaviour (disease avoidance behaviour), there is a keen prop as to its ability to explain positive health action, such as the pursuit of good health unmotivated by the threat of specific diseases; fourth, and finally, it is shown that only health beliefs specific to disease “x” are predictive of disease “x” health behaviour (Wolinsky, 1988).

In line with the HBM’s four key constructs, myths and lifestyles are triangulately explained as consequences of the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria. The individual who perceives susceptibility about COVID-19 should adhere to myths and lifestyles that will help him or her to prevent the spread of same. Thus, to engage in the foregoing behaviours will help the perceived susceptible individual to reduce the risk of getting COVID-19 in Nigeria. For perceived severity, the individual who perceived the severity or seriousness of COVID-19 may take to positive myths and lifestyles to reduce its prevalence seriously for healthy living among Nigerians. Hence, anything to the contrary will predispose the individual to seriousness of COVID-19, in the event of its contact and contraction for subsequent spread in Nigeria.

Furthermore, an individual develops perceived benefits to healthy living when he or she has imbibed health promotion behaviours (wearing of face mask, ensuring regular washing of hand, using of sanitizers, obeying the rules of two metres physical distancing, ensuring regular exercises, ensuring and maintaining good nutrition, etc.) that will help manage COVID-19 and/or prevent its spread in Nigeria. In the circumstances where an individual obeys the protocols of prevention and control of COVID-19, thereby reducing the susceptibility and seriousness of the disease, he or she will achieve perceived benefits of restoring wellbeing, besides protecting others from getting it in Nigeria. In achieving healthy living and wellbeing of Nigerians, perceived barriers such as negative myths and lifestyles should be avoided; since

they serve as obstacles to the promotion of healthy behaviour. In doing so, Nigerians will promote their health as well as help in curbing the spread of COVID-19 by avoiding the aforementioned perceived barriers for health enhancing behaviours in Nigeria.

### **Discussions of Ways Out of Myths and Lifestyles as Consequences of the Spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria**

With regard to the myths and lifestyles that engender the spread of COVID-19, the following are suggested as ways out:

- i. The Federal Government should through its traditional and social media outlets as well as traditional medium of communication (by the use of town crier, house-to-house messages, town hall spaced meetings), etc. inform, educate and communicate with the public on the volcanic dangers of COVID-19, and why certain myths such as the virus was caused by 5G technology, it is a way to exploit Nigerians financially, and also an international politics to destroy the economy of Nigeria should be discouraged; as the virus and the associated diseases exist. Beyond these myths, the Federal Government should, through the aforementioned media outlets ensure that Nigerians also avoid certain lifestyles such as unsafe sexual intercourse, social gathering in public places, group eating, drinking and body contact as well as avoid self-medication, in order to halt the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria. Above all, Nigerians should adhere to protocols by NCDC with regard to the prevention and control of COVID-19 in Nigeria.
- ii. The Federal Government should improve on existing law on disease outbreaks by including the NCDC and PTF committee's protocols alongside putting offences on resisted myths or prohibit them, in order to manage the prevention and control of COVID-19; in addition to preventing any future outbreak of any disease in Nigeria. In doing so, the law should provide for COVID-19 protocols with associated stringent punishments on those who will disobey it in Nigeria. In keeping with this law, the Federal Government should as a matter of mandamus ensure that this law is domesticated in States as well as obeyed by all and sundry therein.
- iii. The Federal Government in conjunction with the State Governments should teach and demonstrate the evidence of the origin of coronavirus on social media and cable television networks, and even ensure physical demonstration of it in rural areas, in order to change the mythological origin of same among Nigerians. By this action, many Nigerians will change their myths or misconceptions about the origin and reality of COVID-19 as well as make amend to the political, socio-economic and health dangers associated with the virus in Nigeria.
- iv. Religious organizations and private business organizations should, in conjunction with Federal and State Governments encourage positive myths and lifestyles in the religious houses, schools and factories or workplaces, with respect to management or control of COVID-19 and other diseases in Nigeria. In line with this, organizations should include COVID-19 protocols, in addition to protocols of other diseases in their policies in order to guide workers with regards to the spread of COVID-19 and/or outbreaks of future diseases. In accordance with this, COVID-19 protocols and disease prevention should be included in school curricula in Nigeria. With this, Nigerian students will learn how to



prevent and control COVID-19 or any other disease outbreak earlier for better management of same in the future, rather than rely on myths.

### Conclusion

In accordance with the findings of this study, it is clear that myths and lifestyles were the springboards that are largely responsible for the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria. In fact, through the deliberate efforts of the researcher to achieve ways out of the foregoing, the study suggests that laws should be strengthened, while myths and lifestyles that negate the halting of the spread of COVID-19 should be discouraged, in order to reduce community-to-community spread, morbidity and mortality of the disease among Nigerians.

In congruence with the proffered ways out of the spread of COVID-19, the study further suggests that similar studies be carried out to help sustain and strengthen its findings in Nigeria. These include precise studies on the relationship between medical practitioners' lifestyles and the level of containment of COVID-19 as well as the role of cultural medium of information in curbing the spread of the coronavirus in Nigeria.

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