

AFRICAN MODEL OF APPROACHING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract

Severe acute respiratory syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-COV-2), also known as "COVID-19" is the third novel coronavirus to emerge in this century. Following the sudden outbreak of this pandemic from China in 2019, the whole world was thrown into panic. As a result, economic and other activities were halted. The confusion on how to combat the spread of this virus led many continents, including Africa into providing measures to curtail the spread. At the start of this pandemic, World Health Organization's African regional office and the Africa Centre for Disease Control provided guidance, technical and financial support to prepare countries. The swift response and approaches employed to contain the spread of this pandemic influenced this research. The purpose of this study is to examine and discuss the afrocentric approach in curtailing the spread of the virus. Descriptive model of research is employed to analyse the materials in this study. The research concludes that, in order to contain this virus like other diseases, citizens

should adhere strictly to the precautionary measures put in place by World Health Organisation and other health agencies.

Introduction

Coronavirus is said to belong to a large family of viruses with major pathogens that principally targets humans and animals' respiratory system. According to World Health Organizations (WHO) record, Previous outbreaks of coronaviruses (CoVs) include the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS-CoV) and the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS-CoV) which have been previously characterized as agents that are of great threat to public health. Hafeez, e'tal. (2020) states that World Health Organization (WHO) originally called this infectious disease Novel Coronavirus-Infected Pneumonia (NCIP) and the virus had been named 2019 novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV). On 11th February, 2020, WHO officially renamed the clinical condition COVID-19 (a shortening of Corona Virus Disease-19). According to Chikwe and Emmanuel (2020), In late December 2019, a cluster of patients was admitted to hospitals with an initial diagnosis of pneumonia of an unknown aetiology. These patients were epidemiologically linked to a seafood and wet animal wholesale market in Wuhan, Hubei Province, China.

In Africa., the year 2020 was greeted by the outbreak of this deadly coronavirus, following the first case on the 14th of February in Egypt, and on the 27th of same month in Nigeria, a Sub-Saharan Africa region. This came at the time when almost all African countries had undertaken a Joint External Evaluation (JEE) of the International Health Regulations (IHR). This progression aided countries ascertain the lacuna in their ability to prevent, detect, and respond to public health threats. Many countries had developed capabilities in real-time surveillance and immunization, but overall, there was a pressing need for improving the resilience of the health sector in order to ensure effective outbreak response. In view of this, the purpose of this study is to examine and discuss the afrocentric approach in curtailing the spread of the virus. Descriptive model of research is employed to analyse the materials in this study. The research concludes that, in order to contain this virus like other diseases, citizens should adhere strictly to the precautionary measures put in place by WHO and other agencies.

Origin And Transmission Of COVID-19

Ahmad e'tal, (2020), posits that in 1965, the first case of coronaviruses was found in human by Tyrrell and Bynoe. It was observed in human embryonic tracheal organ cultures obtained from the respiratory tract of an adult with a common cold symptom. In 2019, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP) in China, started monitoring the outbreak of a new coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, which causes the respiratory illness known as COVID-19. (Unhale, 2020). The virus was first discovered in Huanan, a Seafood Market in Wuhan, South China. Huanan seafood market is a place where raccoon dogs, bats, snakes, palm civets, and other animals are sold. However, the zoonotic source of SARS-CoV- 2 is not confirmed, although, the sequence-based analysis suggested bats to be the main reservoir. The virus that causes coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is a highly transmittable and pathogenic viral infection and mainly transmitted through contact with respiratory droplets rather than through the air. Primarily, people can contract coronavirus disease (COVID-19) from others who are infected. A single cough can circulate up to 3,000 droplets. These droplets can land on other people, and covering surfaces around them, however, several smaller particles will stay within the air. The virus is also shed or extended in faecal matter, thus anyone who fail to wash his hands properly after visiting the toilet or bathroom could contaminate anything he touches. Like many respiratory viruses, Covid-19 can be spread by close contact with small droplets released from infected individuals' upper respiratory tract secretions, which includes sneezing, common cold or coughing from the nose and mouth. That is why it is advised to stay more than 1 meter (3 feet) away from a person who is sick. The virus can also be transmitted through surface contamination when these droplets land on objects and surfaces around the person and any individual who touches these objects or surfaces and further touches his eyes, nose or mouth could be infected with COVID-19.

Symptoms Of COVID-19

Symptoms of Coronavirus includes Cold or flu-like symptoms which usually set in from 2-4 days after infection and are typically mild. Although, symptoms differ from individuals, and some forms of the virus can be deadly. Other symptoms include; Sneezing, running nose, cough, watery diarrhea, fever in rare cases, sore throat, intensified cases of asthma, among others.

Challenges Of COVID-19

Like other ailments, diseases and viruses, Covid-19 posed a major threat to the people's wellbeing. There were great challenges as access to advanced care in the public health system was limited. Most people failed to adhere to the preventive measures put in place by WHO and UNICEF. Some find it hard to believe that such virus exists, let alone entering Africa. While others felt it's another device by the government to enrich themselves from the world's treasury. Again, non-compliance to social distancing rules. Lack of good source of running water in rural areas. It was advised that people should wash their hands regular under running water, with soap, most communities with poor social amenities were unable to comply to this rule. Next, some alcohol-based hand sanitizers turned to be hazardous as they were reported to be inflammable. Furthermore, Africa, like some other countries of the world, are unable to meet the increasing demands for testing kits, and equipping designated health centres appropriately.

Afrocentric Response On Coronavirus

Response is a reaction to something that has happened or has been said (Hornby 2005). Hornby also defines Afro to mean combining form (in nouns or adjectives) In Africa, there are various ways people react to issues that differs from person to person or from culture to culture. Africans responded to COVID-19 in African way based on their understanding, view and culture. Following the sudden outbreak of Coronavirus (COVID-19) in Africa, African countries in bid of containing the spread; made intensive surveillance and case-finding their focal point. Basing their influence on the use of Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response framework (IDSR), which was adopted by countries in the World Health Organisation African region. Countries such as South Africa and Nigeria took advantage of and integrating molecular laboratory diagnostic capacity that exists for specific disease programs like drug-resistant tuberculosis, Lassa fever, and HIV, to scale-up testing for COVID-19. While access to diagnostic reagents becomes difficult, countries like Ghana pioneered pooled testing of COVID-19 samples, therefore speeding up processing time and population coverage.

Some scrupulous social measures have also been implemented across Africa. For instance, different Countries closed their borders to reduce the level of international transmission and contain the level of local infection. self-isolation for infected/exposed persons was advised, and established centres for quarantining

of cases were put in place. In Nigeria for instance, different stadia were converted to isolation centres. Some Federal University Teaching Hospitals like the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital (UPTH), University of Lagos Teaching Hospital (ULTH), and others, were designated treatment centres. Countries and communities were locked down. As these public health measures aim at flattening the rate of transmission take effect, it was envisaged that the health system will have fewer cases of severely ill patients. The gaps in service provision by the public health care system are being complemented by private hospitals accredited by government authorities to provide safe care.

In the face of this pandemic, Madagascar's president; Andry Rajoelina emerged as one of the biggest cheerleaders for an herbal tea called Covid-organics, advertised as an African cure for covid-19. This covid-organics is an Artemisia based drink. The herbal drink is produced from species under the Artemisia genus from which artemisinin is extracted for malaria treatment. In the spirit of African brotherhood, the Madagascan government distributed the Covid-Organics to different countries in Africa. Despite World Health Organisation (WHO) insistence that the virus has no known cure, this country took the covid-organic owing to the African believe that trees and plants can be used to cure any ailment. In like manner, Ooni of Ife, Adeyeye Enitan Ogunwusi also took a drastic measure by looking inward and proffering the use of traditional herbs for the cure of corona virus. According to him, the following herbs are potent and efficacious enough to cure anyone attacked by the virus. They are: boundary tree leaves (*Ewe Akoko*), Neem leave and fruits, Indian lilac (*Ewe dogoyaro*), onion, forest Anchomanes (*ogirisako*), Aridan, African pepper/negro/ guinea pepper (*Eeru or Erinje*), bitter leaf, and what a view

In Rivers State- Nigeria, several agencies embarked on measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. For instance, Agencies such as National Primary Health Care Development Agency, Rivers State Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE), National Orientation Agency (NOA), United Nations Children Education Fund (UNICEF), National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), World Health Organization (WHO), Faith for Life Initiative (F4L) etc, took it upon themselves to sensitize the populace by embarking on community visitation, contact tracing, quarantining coronavirus victims, enforcing wearing of face mask in public places and organizing post-covid training skill, to mention but a few, as a way to enlighten the public and limit the spread of the virus.

Some of this gesture were carried out by the Chairman of Ikwerre and Obio/Akpor Local Government. As a way of sensitizing, preventing and curbing the spread of the virus (Alalibo, 2020). In addition to this, Rivers State Government also released a counterpart funding of the European Union Niger Delta Support Programme (EU-NDSP) on water project to ease the provision of water and regular hand washing to curtail the virus (Igbiks, 2020).

Again, Faith for Life Initiative (F4L) organized by National Orientation Agency (NOA) and sponsored by United Nations Children's Fund in collaboration with Rivers State Risk Communication and Community Engagement mobilized religious leaders in the country within the state of their operation to sanitize and to handle health related matters. In another respect, the South-South Geo-Political Zone created sensitization team, an advocacy group that sensitize clerics of Christians, Muslims and Traditional religions (Ekiye, 2020). Speaking with Ekiye, on the peoples' response to covid-19 issue, he reported that many Africans especially those in Rivers State do not believe that Covid-19 is real. Majority argue that Covid-19 is malaria and even those who believe, feel it should be treated traditionally with African roots and herbs.

A close interaction with people from Ekpeye Community, they also expressed same view that the virus is not real, it is malaria and should be treated with African herbs. Godhead (2020), posits that most people from Ekpeye including herself do not keep to Covid-19 precautionary measures of wearing face mask, because of the difficulty in breathing while carrying out work. And that this has made some not to travel to Ahoada main town, where they will be checked. She also reported that they see regular washing of hands as a waste of time, owing to the fact that their main occupation (farming) is a work that attracts dirty. Those who do not believe in the reality of Covid-19 also do not keep to social distancing rule. Most of them may have died due to the infection but since they do not believe, they hardly access hospital for testing and treatment as such death may not have been recorded by health personnel. But among these nonchalant people are also very meticulous people who keep to the rule and are free from contacting the virus and the harms thereafter.

Conclusion

In spite of the challenges experienced by Africans and the world at large, following the outbreak of SARS-CoV-2 (Corona virus), Africans still have enough to be thankful for, as measures were put in place to help curtail and contain the virus.

In response to the lockdown and the challenges of responding to the pandemic, innovative use of technology and new ways of working in health and other non-health sectors have been introduced. For instance, technical and mechanised equipment were used to transport test kits and samples from rural or remote areas to the testing centres in the cities where laboratories are situated. Thus, reducing the time from hours to minutes; similarly, there is a boom in local production of face masks; soap and hand sanitizers. Again, training, meetings, and workshops have moved online. State and federal governments in Nigeria have improved hazard allowances and provide insurance for staff on the frontline of the infection. African businessmen and other corporate organisations raised funds to support the Government. The open, frequent, and transparent communication of testing results within most African countries confirm the progress of controlling the diseases despite the challenges of access to testing in many countries.

Recommendation

Therefore, in the light of this study, the following are recommended;

- That more teachings and sensitization of Africa people be done by her governing health sector.
- That Africans should keep to the rule of social distancing
- Wearing of face mask
- Regular washing of hands.
- Avoid touching of nose, eyes, mouth.
- Use alcohol-based sanitizer to disinfect hands etc.

Finally, in the light of the fore-going discussion, the study concludes that corona virus is not a death sentence. Without mincing words, Africans see the Covid-19 as another avenue by those in political authority to make money. The manner with which the issue of the pandemic was handled, leaves much question than answer. Africans believe in what they can see and participate in bringing about. This is one major departure between the western approach to the pandemic and the African model. In Africa, communalism still remains a very strong force. Here, one individual is his brother's keeper. On this premise, any policy no matter how good which isolates the people and deny them making input is not likely to succeed. This is why perhaps Governments in Africa found it difficult to impose the western model of fighting the pandemic here in Africa.

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