



The Impacts of Covid-19 Lockdown on the Mental Health of Nigerians

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ABSTRACT

The paper mirrored the devastating effects of mental health on Nigerians during the COVID-19 lockdown. Mental health is the totality of man's health, when man is mentally sound the body remains healthy. Environment, economic, social and biological factors can trigger mental health disorder which is evident in symptoms like low energy, feelings of hopelessness, withdrawal from people etc. People who have these challenges can be introduced to yoga sessions to take off their mind from negative thoughts, connecting with intervention groups and the paper strongly recommended the government debunk false beliefs about COVID-19, establish more psychological intervention centres across the Nation.

Key words: COVID-19, Lockdown, Mental health, Nigeria etc.

Introduction

In December 2019, there was an outbreak of a respiratory illness caused by Corona virus disease, in Wuhan, Hubei province, China and began to spread to other cities of China and around the world (Panics *et al.*, 2020, Wang D. *et al.*, 2020).

On the 11th of February 2020, World Health Organisation announced the official name. The virus was to be called COVID-19, a shortened version of Coronavirus disease 2019 so that it will indicate a difference from other known coronaviruses.

On the 11th of March, 2020 it was discovered that the virus had widely spread and numerous death were recorded, this made World Health Organisation to declare it a pandemic (WHO, 2020b).

The year 2020 experienced a dreadful disruption because of the wild spread of COVID-19. The virus took the world by surprise as the medical response was not sufficient and Nigeria was not left out due to her weak health care system.

Coronavirus

Coronaviruses are a large family of zoonotic that cause illnesses which ranges from common cold to severe respiratory diseases. Zoonotic means these viruses are able to be transmitted from animals to humans. There are several coronaviruses known to be circulating in different animal populations, that have not yet infected humans and COVID-19 is the most recent virus to jump from animals to man (Vince McLeod, 2020).

Common symptoms of COVID-19 infections are similar to common colds and includes respiratory symptoms such as dry cough, fever, shortness of breath and breathing difficulties. In more severe cases the infection can cause pneumonia, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), kidney failure and death among the elderly and people with underlying chronic illnesses like diabetes, High Blood Pressure etc.

The COVID-19 infection is spread from one person to another through droplets from the respiratory system of an infected person often during sneezing or coughing, close contact with people who are infected and contaminated areas prone to touch (WHO, 2020b). It is worthy to note that some infected persons are carriers of the virus with no visible symptoms while other infected persons may exhibit visible symptoms and still recover (Saner, 2020). With the wild spread and recorded deaths from COVID-19 infection across the world certain safety measures like use of hand sanitizers, frequent washing of hands with soap, use of face masks and social distancing were put in-place to contain the spread but this seemed not to work as the daily infections continued to increase. The worst hit nations decided to lockdown, Nigeria also joined and a lockdown order came in March 2020.

The lockdown order meant that all schools were shut down abruptly, travel to and from other states was put on hold, businesses and offices were closed, religious and social gatherings were, no longer in place, people were restricted to their homes. But these restrictions did not apply to hospitals and stores selling essential commodities such as groceries and medicine. This was done to enable the COVID-19 task force identify, trace and isolate those who had

come in contact with all confirmed cases beginning from the first confirmed case recorded in the country (Nigeria) on the 27th of February 2020 from a traveller.

Out of fear and anxiety people engaged in panic buying of food items to sustain them during the period of lockdown, face masks and other health equipments like thermometers, hand sanitizers and drugs. This caused a major shortage in household items, there was a hike in prices of goods, frontline health care staff worked for more hours than it was their norm causing them to have less sleep hours which in turn led to poor productivity at work.

These and many other factors led to a disrupted lifestyle which gradually affected the mental health of some people. Prior to the lockdown, the Nigerian government reported that 3 in 10 Nigerians had suffered from one form of mental health disorder or another (Levi, Kinsley & Richard 2021). With COVID-19 and the eventual lockdown order the mental health of citizens had increased because many people were vulnerable to emotional stress arising from uncertainties, losses of all kinds, anxiety, confusion, stress, worry, boredom, anger, separation arising from quarantine etc.

Mental Health

According to World Health Organisation "health is a state of complete physical mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." The WHO further stated that mental health is a state of well being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stress of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community". Mental health has even thing to do with one's emotional, psychological and social wellbeing. It determines how we make choices, relate with others around us and how we are able to deal with stressors from childhood through to adulthood. Anyone who has mental health challenges experiences an altered behaviour, changes in mood and thought pattern.

WHO (2018) stresses that mental health is much more than the absence of mental disabilities but also includes wellness and happiness which can be seen and felt by others and the individual.

Mental health is a very important aspect of our lives, it can affect daily living relationships and physical healthy, it caused a disorder in the mind leading to disruption in normal thinking, feelings, mood, behaviour, interpersonal interaction accompanied by significant distress.

3 in 10 suffered mental decoder

Levi Osuagwu *et al.*, (2021) in their survey on facebook, whatsapp & emails in the months of April and May 2020 2,032 adults were surveyed and 556 respondents were from Nigeria. The survey reported that almost all Nigerians reported symptoms of mental health (500 or 89.9%) Half of them reported feeling anxious (47.1%), 31.7% of the respondents reported being frustrated and 59. 2% reported feelings boredom while the lockdown lasted.

Early Signs of Mental Health Disorder

The following are some of the early signs of mental health breakdown:

- ❖ Withdrawal from friends, colleagues and family
- ❖ Avoiding the activities they usually enjoyed
- ❖ Eating too much or too little
- ❖ Feelings of hopelessness
- ❖ Having consistently low energy
- ❖ Sleeping too much or too little
- ❖ Displaying negative emotions
- ❖ Thinking of causing physical harm to self and others around.
- ❖ Experiencing delusions
- ❖ Inability to perform daily tasks like bathing, cooking, taking care of children etc.
- ❖ Using mood - altering substances including alcohol and nicotine more frequently.

Factors that can Trigger Mental Health Disorder

❖ Biological Factors;

The genetic family history of a person can increase the likelihood of mental health disorders. Health conditions such as stress, depression and anxiety tends to occur when there are life- changing physical health problems like cancer, diabetes and chronic pain.

❖ Social and Economic Factors

Having limited finances to fund the lifestyle you are used to, restrictions on movement could trigger mental health conditions.

The lockdown order placed a restriction on movement, this meant that people continued to see the same faces and interacted with the same set of people every day as long as the lockdown order lasted.

Secondly, people with "weak economic status" who depended mostly on daily stipends from employees were cash trapped and were also predisposed to develop mental health issues.

Thirdly, some of the gainfully employed people lost their jobs during the lockdown as a result of inactivity from their companies these set of people were also prone to develop mental health challenges.

❖ **Environmental Factors:**

These are stressors that people deal with in everyday life, environmental factors are more psychological based, making them more closely related.

Events that evoke feeling of loss or damage are like to cause a mental breakdown in an individual. These factors includes trauma, loss of job, not meeting social expectations, poverty, low self- esteem, dysfunctional home, abuse or molestation, domestic violence, caring for a sick person, debts, death of a close person etc.

These and more are some the experiences of Nigerians during the lockdown, many people who developed mental health challenge during this period could have reported to experience at least five of these factors.

Caring For Patients With Mental Health Disorder

The lockdown order and ban on inter-state travel has long been lifted but COVID-19 is still existing. On the 8th of July 2020, the Delta variant of COVID-19 was detected in a traveler to Nigeria. The WHO called it SARS-Cov-2 Delta variant because of it's increased transmissibility and increased ability to cause harm.

The virus is still with us, to contain the spread we need to continue the routine of frequent hand washing, using efface masks, maintaining social distance and using hand sanitizers.

But for those with mental health disorders the following are ways of caring for them:

- ❖ Regular exercises, adopting yoga and other stress reducing measures because of their benefits to the brain.
- ❖ Taking care of their emotional health to maintain clearer thought processes and problem solving skills.
- ❖ Engaging in activities that will distract them like learning a skill to take away their thoughts from things that cause anxiety, worry, depression etc.
- ❖ Talking to trusted persons on phone or in person (while adhering to COVID – 19precautions) about one's feelings, concerns and challenges.
- ❖ Connecting them with depression and anxiety - focused intervention groups.
- ❖ Seeking immediate professional help for them or speaking to close friends or familymembers when there is crises.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 Pandemic has been a stressful experience to all Nigerians. Life after the lockdown and living with the pandemic has brought about devastating realities like loss of jobs, death of loved ones and negative emotions. An end to the pandemic is not yet in view. We have to continue the safety guidelines to reduce the spread of the virus and appropriate measures has to be put in place by the government for a happy and robust nation again.

Recommendations

For the wellbeing of Nigerian citizens, government should adopt the following recommendations:

- (1) Monitor and discard false beliefs and information about COVID-19 and educate the public about the devastating effect of COVID-19,
- (2) There should be psychological interventions to cushion the effects of COVID-19 and improve the mental wellbeing of the populace,
- (3) The mass and print media should continue to engage the people with exciting playlets, drama and jingles about COVID-19.
- (4) Government should engage those who lost their jobs during the lockdown in skill acquisition to reduce the hardship they are experiencing.
- (5) Government should establish more psychological intervention centres across the nation for times such as the pandemic period.
- (6) Government should promote actions that promote psychological well being. An environment that protects and respects political, socio-economic and cultural rights of citizens is essential for one's mental health.

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