Social Distancing: An Effective Tool in the Fight against the Spread of Coronavirus Pandemic in Nigeria

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Abstract
The entire world was thrown into a pandemonium following the outbreak of the corona virus and the speed at which the virus was spreading globally. Today, the corona virus pandemic has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people worldwide. It has become the most talked about viral disease spread in the 21st century. Social distancing has been put in place as a workable measure to check the spread of the virus by affected nations. In Nigerian, for instance individuals must be socially responsible for social distancing to be effective. To this end, the study adopted the social responsibility theory as its theoretical underpinning. This theory was developed by Peterson and Shcramm in their book in (1956) it evaluates the impact of individual actions on our collective existence and societal survival. Data were collected through secondary sources while historical and descriptive methods were used in its analysis. The study recommended the strict adherence to social distancing as a way of preventing the speed transmission at which the corona virus is being transmitted in Nigeria.

Keywords: Social distancing, Corona virus, Pandemic, Transmission.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Following the outbreak of the corona virus in Wuhan, China and its subsequent spread to other parts of the globe, it became imperative for measures to be put in place to slow down the rate at which the virus is spreading. Measures put place include social distancing or preferably physical distancing as "framed" by the World Health Organization (WHO). Unfortunately, many Nigerians, more especially rural people do not believe in the existence of the corona virus. They see no reason for the imposition of lockdown by the government. Again they don't even know what social distancing is all about. As a result, a good number of Nigerians ignore government lockdown measures and go about their normal businesses with

serious health consequences on the population. Today, the corona virus pandemic is on the rampage in Nigeria with new cases on daily basis. If this trend continues, in no distant time our health facilities will be overwhelmed by the virus. It is now important to make Nigerians understand the realities on ground, embrace social distancing as an effective mechanism to slow down the disease spread and eventually "kick" corona virus out of the country within the shortest possible time.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
The objectives of this paper are:
1. To reduce the spread of the Corona Virus Pandemic in Nigeria.
2. To promote all programs and efforts aimed at reducing the spread of the corona virus in Nigeria.
3. To ascertain the impact of social distancing on the reduction of the spread of corona virus in Nigeria.
4. To advocate strict adherence to social distancing as a measure that would possibly lead to the reduction, spread and possible eradication of corona virus in Nigeria.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEMS
1. To examine the factors responsible for the spread of the corona virus pandemic in Nigeria
2. To determine the effectiveness of social distancing as one of the measures put in place to curb the spread of the corona virus in Nigeria.
3. To ascertain if other measures put in place by the government are effective and at the same time complimenting each other.

METHOLOGY
This paper would adopt the use of historical method. Simply put, the study would be based on data, facts, information and opinion gathered through secondary sources. The paper will be enriched through textual materials including journals and seminar papers. Descriptive and historical methods would be used in data analysis.

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK
This paper will adopt the social responsibility theory as its theoretical foundation. The theory started in Europe and took a shape with the commission on the freedom of press that happened in the United States of America (USA) in 1949. The model was formerly designed by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm in their book, in 1956. Social responsibility is an ethical theory in which individuals are accountable for fulfilling their civic duty; the actions of an individual must benefit the whole society. In this way, there must be a balance between economic growth and welfare of society and environment. This approach seeks to support accountability in our individual actions on our collective existence and societal survival. It is of the opinion that individual actions should not only benefit society but must also be in accordance with societal expectations.

CONCEPTUAL EXPLICATION
In this review four concepts will be discussed viz social distancing, Corona virus pandemic and transmission.
1. **Social Distancing:** social distancing also called physical distancing is a set of non-pharmaceutical interventions or measures taken to prevent the spread of contiguous disease by maintaining a physical distance between people and reducing the number of times people come into close contact with each other. It typically involves keeping a

certain distance from others (the distance specified may differ from time to time and country to country) and avoiding gathering together in large groups. By reducing the probability that a given infected person will come into physical contact with an infected person the disease transmission can be suppressed, resulting in fewer deaths. The measures are used in combination with good respiratory hygiene and hand washing by a population. During the covid-19 pandemic, the world health organization (WHO) suggested favoring the term "physical distancing" as opposed to "social distancing" in keeping with the fact that it is a physical distance which prevents transmission; people can remain socially connected via technology. To slow down the spread of infectious disease and avoid overburdening health care systems, particularly during a pandemic, several social distancing measures are used, including the closing of schools and workplaces, isolation, quarantine, restricting the movement of people and the cancelation of mass gatherings
Source: www.wikipedia.org

This diagram shows how to maintain Social/Physical Distancing in a gathering.

Source: (www.google.com).

2. **Pandemic:** A pandemic is an epidemic of disease that has spread across a large region, for instance multiple continents or worldwide, affecting a substantial number of people. An example of a pandemic is the Black Death Pandemic of 1347 – 1352 which claimed several millions of lives (Source: www.wikipedia.org). The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines pandemic as a disease that spreads over a whole country or the whole world. In other words, it could also mean occurring over a wide geographic area and affecting an exceptionally high proportion of the population. Both pandemic and epidemic are used interchangeably. While pandemic is seen as a global outbreak of a disease from a new virus, epidemic is a term that is often broadly used to describe any problem that has grown out of control. Again, an epidemic is an event in which a disease is actively spreading. In contrast, the term pandemic relates to geographic spread and is used to describe a disease that affects a whole country or the entire world. (source: www.verywellhealth.com)

3. **Corona Virus:** Corona Virus is a type of virus that causes disease in humans and animals. In humans, it usually causes respiratory infections (in the nose, throat, or chest) that are not serious, but that can sometimes cause more serious infections that can kill people. Source: (www.dictionary.cambridge.org).

A medical definition of Corona Virus states that it is a common Virus that infects humans, typically leading to an upper respiratory infection (URI). According to this source, seven different types of human Corona Virus have been identified. Most people according to this source will be infected with at least one type of Corona Virus in their life time. The source also stated that the viruses are spread through the air by coughing and sneezing, close personal contact, touching an object or surface contaminated with the virus and rarely, by fecal contamination. The illness caused by most Corona Viruses usually last a short time and it is characterized by runny nose, sore throat, feeling unwell, cough, and fever.

Example of human Corona Viruses that have been reported to cause severe symptoms include MERS-COV (the beta Corona Virus that causes Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, or MERS), SARS-COV (the beta Corona Virus that causes severe acute respiratory syndrome, or SARS, and the new 2019 novel Corona Virus (2019-n cov) outbreak that began in Wuhan, China.
Source: (www.medicainenet.com)

4. **Transmission:** The process of passing something from one person or place to another: the transmission of disease, passing on illness and causing disease. Source: www.dictionary,cambrigde.org.

It is also seen as the act or process of sending electrical signals to a radio, television, computer etc: the act or process by which something is spread or passed from one person or thing to another. Source: www.merriam-webster.com
Again, it is the action or process of transmitting something or state of being transmitted. Source: www.lexico.com

In medicine, public health, and biology, transmission is the passing of a pathogen causing communicable disease from an infected host individual or group, regardless of whether the other individual was previously infected. Source: www.wikipedia.org

LITERATURE REVIEW:
Although the term, social distancing was only introduced in the twenty first century, the bible contains or accounts for one of the earliest known references to the practice.
In the book of Leviticus 13:46 "And the leper in whom the plaque is – he shall dwell alone; (outside) the camp shall his habitation be. "During the plaque of Justinian of 541 to 542, emperor Justinian enforced an ineffective quarantine on the Byzantine Empire including dumping of bodies into the sea; he predominantly blamed the widespread out break on Jews, Samaritans, Pagans, Heretics, Arians, Montanist, and Homosexuals". In modern times, social distancing measures have been successfully implemented in several epidemics. In St. Louis, shortly after the first cases of influenza, were detected in the city during the 1918 flu pandemic, authorities implement school closures, bans on public gatherings and other social distancing intervention. Source; (www.wikipedi.org) The situation we are in as a result of the corona virus pandemic ravaging the world and our country Nigeria calls for certain drastic actions to prevent further spread of the virus locally and globally.
According to situation ethics, otherwise known as the new morality, emphasis is on the situation as the determining factor in the morality of any action. Nwaike (1996:14)
In other words, that someone distant himself from others in this moment of corona virus pandemic does not mean hatred rather, it is just the situation on ground that warranted that.
The decision by an individual to stay away from others in order not to contact the corona virus is both ethically and morally justifiable. Indeed ethics is the study of questions of

morality, the search to understanding what is right and wrong or good and bad. It is a branch of philosophy that systematically studies moral ideals and goals, motives of choice and patterns of good and bad conduct, Okezie and Osondu (2013).

Social distancing is a measure aimed at saving lives in a pandemic situation, and it is imperative that even as individual we key into it as part of our personal social responsibility which addresses how we live our lives and the impact we have on everyone around us, both locally and globally.

This means that everything we do matter and makes a positive or a negative impact on everything around us, Braimoh (2017:170)

Egesi, (2014:71) says that it is through the mass media that people are socialized, how to dress, how to dance etc. it has become a responsibility to the government and other stake holders to effectively use it to educate the people more especially those in the rural areas to key into social distancing as a measure aimed at reducing the spread of corona virus in Nigeria. Obodoechi (2009:15) defines village or rural area as a geographical area away from large urban settlements and is inhabited by rural people. It is not an over statement to say that rural communities over the years have been neglected in terms of the provision of basic social amenities-pipe borne water, electricity, good road networks, affordable health care, housing etc.

Most rural people are not informed as their counterparts in the cities, many fall within the category of illiterate class. A good number of them do not know what social distancing is all about; in fact many do not believe in the existence of the corona virus in Nigeria. They see it as a "Scam" on the part of government. As a result of this unbelief on the part of the rural people, they still go about their normal businesses without observing distancing as been advocated by the authorities. It is important to note that rural people have a way of life, and they are addicted to it. Anything contrary to this will be unacceptable and may be resented.

Anyone who goes contrary to the acceptable standard or behavior in the rural area which is very customary may be seen as a deviant. According to Braimoh (2017:1), in social system, the norms of acceptable behavior became the standard against which so-called deviant behavior may be judged. The imposition of social distancing by the government as a way of reducing the spread of the corona virus pandemic in Nigeria comes with a lot of social problems mainly amongst the uninformed rural people. To them, it alters the way people relate in a society. Puller and Myers (1941) defines social problem as a deviation from some social norms which they cherish. In Nigeria and indeed societies that have strong attachment to the extended family system, the mode of relationship is largely informal. People visit extended relations without formal notices, embrace and shake hands during such meetings.

ORIGIN OF COVID-19

Many theories are being adduced regarding the origin of the corona virus. One of such theories says that the covid-19 originated in a laboratory in Wuhan, China.

This supports certain opinions in certain quarters although not very clear that the virus was man-made, that it was part of a Chinese conspiracy to dominate the world economically.

Another theory from a scientific view point says that Covid-19 may have originated in bats. Scientists say, although not very clear now the implications of pangolins (pangolins are the most illegally traded mammal in the world) as the intermediary host between bats and human. A world health organization (WHO) scientists insist that the Covid-19 originated in bats and can infect cats and ferrets but said that more research is needed into the suspected animal link to the disease. According to scientists, it is not out of place to suspect animal connection to the origin of the Covid-19 given the fact that the 2002 SARS outbreak moved from horseshoe bats to cat-like civets before infecting humans. Source: www.forbes.com

COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN NIGERIA:

The first confirmed case relating to Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria was announced on 27 February 2020, when an Italian citizen in Lagos tested positive for the virus caused by SARS-Cov-2. On the 9 March 2020, a second case of the virus was reported in Ewekoro, Ogun State, a Nigerian citizen who had contact with the Italian citizen. As at 11 of May 2020, confirmed cases have reached 4, 399, recovered 778, Death 143. The number of confirmed cases have jumped in recent times because of the speed at which the Coronavirus is spreading across the country. Sources indicate that confirmed cases as at April, 2021 has reached 163,498, recovered 153,788 and deaths 2,058.
Sources: (covid-19.ncdc.gov.ng, Daily Post Newspaper of 8 April, 2021).

HOW TO PRACTICE SOCIAL DISTANCING:

In addition to everyday steps to prevent Covid-19, keeping space between you and others is one of the best tools we have to avoid being exposed to this virus and slowing its spread locally and across the country and the world. Limit close contact with others outside your household indoor and outdoor spaces. Since people can spread the virus before they know they are sick, it is important to stay away from others when possible, even if you or they have no symptoms. Social distancing is especially important for people who are at higher risk for severe illness from Covid-19.

To practice physical distancing the following steps have to be taken;

❖ Stay at least 6feet (about 2 arm's length from other people).
❖ Do not gather in groups.
❖ Stay out of crowded places and avoid mass gathering.
    Source: (www.cdc.gov).

To complement the steps listed above, people should be encouraged to maintain a good respiratory hygiene. The use of face mask, hand sanitizers and regular hand washing on a running water will go a long way in reducing the disease transmission.

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE NON-CHALANT ATTITUDE OVER SOCIAL DISTANCING IN NIGERIA:

1. Laisse l'affaire attitude of our security agencies to effectively implement lockdown orders of the government.
2. Illiteracy/ignorance
3. Poverty
4. Serious attachment to culture and tradition
5. Religious extremism

FINDINGS:

Reports show that many Nigerians still find it difficult to observe social distancing in the face of the coronavirus pandemic. The lockdown imposed by the government is not very effective because there are still unrestricted vehicular movements across the states. People still gather in large numbers, more especially in rural areas; in burial ceremonies and in local markets. Motorists are not helping matters also. They go beyond the number of commuters they are allowed to carry. The reason they are directed to carry fewer numbers of passengers is to ensure spacing and by so doing reduce the transmission of the coronavirus in Nigeria. Some Nigerians, who engage in small scale businesses, say that they cannot lockdown or obey lockdown orders completely in order to save their businesses. They argue that total lockdown will cripple their businesses as many claim that they must go out on daily basis to take care of their families. They insist their families rely on daily income to survive. Some religious

worshippers secretly go to worship centres in total disobedience to government orders on social distancing and other lockdown measures. Generally, the attitude of most Nigerians in terms of obeying lockdown measures put in place by the government to curb the spread of the coronavirus is unacceptable and falls short of the expected standards globally.

RECOMMENDATION:

Arising from our investigations, the following recommendations are put forward;

1. Government and other concerned agencies should intensify campaign on the strict adherence to social distancing. Records show that it is the safest and most effective way of controlling the spread of the coronavirus pandemic in Nigeria.

2. People should be encouraged to maintain a good respiratory hygiene; the use of hand sanitizers, face mask and regular hand washing on a running water. These measures will compliment social distancing in the fight against the spread of the virus in the country.

3. Authorities and other stake holders should ensure that palliatives being distributed to cushion the effect of the pandemic get to the "grass root". This will go a long way in encouraging the people to adhere to measures put in place by the government to fight the coronavirus in the country.

4. Government of Nigeria should make use of this situation to improve on our health care delivery. The government should ensure that our health care system is given adequate attention. Considering, the rate at which the Coronavirus is spreading, a time may come when our health system may be overwhelmed, if nothing tangible is done to improve the sector.

5. The National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and other related agencies should be properly funded in order for them to build the capacity to fight the spread of the coronavirus more especially the new wave of the virus nationwide.

6. Now that the vaccines have been procured by the government, people should avail themselves the opportunity and get vaccinated in order to curb the spread of the coronavirus in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION:

We have seen that the end of the coronavirus pandemic is not in sight at the moment considering the rate at which the coronavirus is spreading in Nigeria. As a result, the most effective way to avoid contracting it is through social distancing, otherwise known as physical distancing. Reports show that the effectiveness of social distancing as a measure put in place to curb the spread of the coronavirus has been proven globally. It is therefore necessary that Nigerians take social distancing seriously, if we must win this war against the spread of the coronavirus in Nigeria.

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