

EFFECTS OF COVID 19 PALLIATIVE ON THE VULNERABLE DURING THE LOCK DOWN IN NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

The study examines the effects of Covid 19 palliative on the vulnerable during the lockdown in Nigeria. The study specifically aimed to explore factors that made COVID-19 a threat to vulnerable people in Nigeria. It also aimed to critically consider the benefits of COVID-19 palliatives to vulnerable people in Nigeria. The study adopted the prospect theory approach as its theoretical framework. The prospect approach offered an explanation regarding human relations and decision-making during risk and uncertainty situations. The study was essentially a qualitative one and secondary data was used to generate relevant information. A critical method was also employed. The results from the study indicated that the gap in infrastructure delivery stood out to worsen the COVID-19 crisis among vulnerable people in Nigeria. The results also revealed the insincerity of political leaders who tend to politicize COVID-19 palliative supports to their own advantage and at the expense of vulnerable people. The study concluded that COVID-19 palliatives tended to develop the political elites to the detriment of the vulnerable people who were the target. To address this situation, the political elites in Nigeria need to focus on the well-being of the citizens rather than their own private pockets. It was therefore recommended that Nigeria's health care system should focus on maintaining existing structures rather than place emphasis on building new structures, the vulnerable citizens should develop an interest in backyard gardening

to provide additional nutrients needed to meet their daily dietary needs to reduce the overdependence on government.

Keywords: COVID-19, Palliatives, Palliative Distribution, Vulnerability.

INTRODUCTION

The novel corona virus disease (COVID-19) outbreak emerged in late 2019 and in the month of March 2020. The virus is transmitted through direct contact with respiratory droplets of an infected person (generated through coughing and sneezing). Individuals can also be infected from touching surfaces contaminated by the virus and touching their face (e.g., eyes, nose, and mouth). The covid-19 virus may survive on surfaces for several hours, but simple disinfectant can kill it (UNICEF, 2020). It was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO). Consequently, governments were beckoned to take aggressive and urgent steps towards suppressing and controlling its spread. Containment of the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria necessitated the initiation and implementation of diverse strategies by the various levels of government. The strategies included mass orientation on improved personal hygiene, travel bans/restrictions, social distancing, and partial/total lockdown in many countries. The partial/total lockdown lasted from March to June 2020 in Nigeria. Some of these measures, especially the partial/total lockdown, impaired daily economic activities. As the pandemic ravaged, the people and food system interaction changed with

indescribable rapidity, hence influencing the choice of diet and nutrition in general. During the lockdown, people were obligated to stay at home for safety, and could only go out to meet the most urgent needs, like buying food.

Coincidentally, the lockdown and social distancing implemented by the governments brought about the following: shutdown of marketplaces, ban of vendors from selling, limits on the number of shoppers, and the development of long queues at points of food purchase. Empty shelves unfortunately have become visible signs of the coping mechanisms many adopted. The grounding of economic activities occasioned by the Covid-19 pandemic consequently threatened household food security and elevated hunger exponentially in the society. The Global Network against Food Crises (2020) noted that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on livelihoods, the national budget, the supply chain, and trade would compound the problems of food security and increase the effect of hunger globally. The food production and supply chain, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, suffered a serious crack, caused by economic contraction and diverse cushiony policies geared towards mitigating the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to WHO (2020), preventive measures used in containing the Covid-19 Pandemic depend on each country's ability to control the spread. However, some of these measures include heightened surveillance, tracing of contact person, and quick identification of suspected cases (Gilbert et al., 2020). This study also affirms that, a country health care system is primarily a means of managing and controlling the spread of the virus. But before Covid-19 pandemic most African countries has been facing challenges of poverty, diseases (Ataguba,2020 p.325), inadequate laboratory equipment's, insufficient public health human resource, deteriorated health

care making it difficult in combating the virus (Ozili,2020; Nkengasong, & Mankula, 2020). As the number of infected cases continues to rise, Nigerians have also felt the crippling effect of the Pandemic, consequently making the government to swiftly responded with these measures such as cessation of movement in almost all the states in the country, self-isolation which includes: travel restriction; shutdown of all public gatherings; closure of schools (Oruonye, & Ahmed, 2020), and social distancing, which has becomes the buzzword in media (Yan, 2020). All these regulations have not gone well with citizens who agitate that it is possible to obey lockdown, but we are hungry, have no food, light, and expect us to stay inside (Peter, 2020). This research emphasizes on the palliative materials distributed during the COVID-19 lockdown to vulnerable people in Nigeria.

It was alleged that the palliatives were hijacked by politicians who turned themselves to be vulnerable. The state's leadership and the local government councils being the closest to the people were saddled with the responsibility of distributing the palliatives to the most vulnerable but the questions that loomed large and which both the federal and state governments are unable to answer is: who are the vulnerable? The government was unable to evolve a transparent process to ensuring fair distribution of the palliatives. Because the idea of undefined vulnerability ploy by the governments to hijack the palliatives for their party faithful without considering those people that lost their jobs or income because of covid 19.

The majority of Corona virus literature has focused on the impact of the virus on healthcare (Ather et al., 2020); Economy and stock markets (Fernandes, 2020, Ozili and Arun, 2020). However, only a few pieces of literature have looked at how palliative material was distributed, but none has specifically examined covid 19 palliative nexus and implication on vulnerability in the context of Nigeria. This

study therefore seeks to find out (a) the factors that made covid 19 a threat to vulnerable people and (b) what is the effects of covid 19 palliative to the vulnerable.

Statement of Problem

There are many infectious diseases in the history of the world, but the COVID-19 has proven to be highly infectious, viral, and contagious. The effect of this infection on human life is unprecedented. This has led to many businesses to close operation, social distancing, and total compliance to lockdown directives by the Federal Government of Nigeria. The effect of this containment measures also led to a negative effect on the cash flow, supplies, revenue, and lack of patronage on businesses generally in Nigeria. In addition, the containment measures such as total lock down, restrictions on movement affected production level, reduced sales, reduced revenue, caused cash trap, hunger, illness, death, unemployment, poverty among others. These challenges hampered the performance of gross domestic product in the world at large since prevalence of COVID-19 pandemic. The effect of these on vulnerable people spurred many researchers to commence in-depth study into identifying and defining how effective is the coping strategies and measures that policy makers, institution, and many other stakeholders such as palliatives in order to contain and avoid similar effects in the future.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine the effect of covid 19 palliatives on the vulnerable people in Nigeria. Specifically, the study aimed to:

- i. Examine the factors that made COVID-19 a threat to vulnerable people in Nigeria.
- ii. Critically explore the benefits of COVID-19 palliatives to vulnerable people in Nigeria.

Concept of Covid 19

Ghada and Aseel (2020) termed Covid 19 as corona viruses (CoV), which they described as a large family of viruses that cause flu in humans. Paules, Marston, and Fauci (2020), further noted that COVID-19 was zoonotic, meaning that it could be transmitted from animals to people. Giving more clarification, Eranga (2020) explained the acronym: 'CO' as corona, 'VI' as virus, 'D' as disease, and '19' as 2019, while also noting that the virus was transmittable through direct contact with the respiratory droplets of an infected person (generated through coughing and sneezing), or by touching surfaces that were contaminated by the virus and at the same time touching one's face; eyes, nose or mouth. Identifying COVID-19 symptoms, Tanhan, et al. (2020) included cough, fever, and shortness of breath. Also, Lin, et al (2021)- citing Wu and McGoogan (2020) observed that there were cases of mild symptom (without pneumonia or only mild pneumonia), severe case with difficulty breathing, and critical cases with respiratory failure, septic shock, and/or multiple organ dysfunction or failure.

Furthermore, Jakovljevic, Bjedov, Jaksic, and Jakovljevic (2020) noted that COVID-19 was a highly contagious disease spreading from human to human relentlessly- and rapidly all over the world. It as an hybrid warfare; implying, a war between countries using corona virus and or a war against the virus which wages war against humans. While Figus described it as a health problem that had become a global issue threatening the social security of people. Tanhan, et al. (2021) noted that COVID-19 had become a pandemic, which severely affect the less privileged households. The COVID-19 crisis was indeed threatening the survival of the less-privileged households' consequent of the preventive and control measures against the COVID-19 that instilled serious fear to humanity particularly the vulnerable people in Nigeria. While, Figus (2021) noted that the longer anyone was exposed to a polluted

environment, the more likely the respiratory system becomes weaker and more fragile in fighting against the effects of COVID-19.

The vulnerable groups would be particularly at risk due to the depth of their poverty, reduced remittances, and the limited capacity of the state to respond (Wood hill, 2020). Social networks and systems which provided support as well as regulated well-being of the less-privileged households were weakened and potentially could degenerate into more crisis due to the restrictive non-pharmaceutical measures put in place like implementing isolation measures, social distancing and quarantine. The impact of COVID- 19 on the older population had been the greatest, especially in Italy where the average age in the fatal cases was 79 years old. Paradoxically, due to infodemics, everyone had a private opinion and alternative truth about COVID-19, people became confused, irrational, anxious, fearful, suspicious, xenophobic and more prone to extreme behaviours; more so infodemic was explained as the rapid spread of information of all kinds, including rumours, gossip, unreliable information, misinformation, and theories of conspiracy among others.

Concept of Covid 19 Palliative

A palliative is something done to reduce the effect of a particular undesirable condition without solving the root cause of the problem. It aims at reducing the harsh effect of a bad condition but does not bring a permanent solution to the problem. In medical field, palliative care is described as a treatment that relieves suffering without curing the actual illness. Its aim is to improve the quality of both the life of the patient and the family. Palliative care is concerned with the needs of the patient rather than the patient's prognosis. Palliatives has become a household name since the outbreak of the novel covid-19 virus especially the terms "palliative donations" and "palliative measures". They have become household terms. Covid-19 Palliative donations are cash

or funds, relief materials donated by government, corporate bodies, international bodies, billionaires, and philanthropists to aid, control covid-19 virus, and cushion the ravaging effect of the pandemic on the poor and vulnerable persons in the society. The palliative donations could be in form of money, relief materials like foodstuffs, medical equipment, and personnel, that are meant to support the vulnerable and the general populace in the fight against covid-19 pandemic, which is the focus of this study.

Concept of Vulnerability

The concept of vulnerability is deeply rooted in the field of natural hazards and poverty (Editorial, 2006). It is true that vulnerability has no universal definition, but undoubtedly it is a powerful analytical tool in describing the existing condition of susceptibility to harm, powerlessness, and marginality of both physical and socio-ecological systems. At the same time, for guiding normative analysis of measures to enhance well-being through reduction of risk (Adger, 2006). However, for clear understanding this study highlighted few selected definitions of vulnerability. According to Bohle et al., (1994), Vulnerability is defined as an internal risk factor of a system that is exposed to hazard and corresponds to its intrinsic tendency to be affected, or susceptible to damage. It represents the physical, economic, social susceptibility or tendency of a community to damage in the case of a threatening circumstances of natural or anthropogenic origin (Cardona, 2003; Emrich & Cutter, 2011). In general sense, vulnerability can be defined as the inability of a system to withstand against the perturbation of external stressors. It is a concept that has been used in different research backgrounds (Adger, 2006; Smit & Wandel, 2006) but there is no consensus on its meaning and definitions (Hufschmidt, 2011). According to Bankert and Amdur (2006), vulnerability means susceptibility to harm.

Based on the research interest, the term has been applied exclusively to the societal, ecological, natural, or biophysical subsystem or to the socio-ecological system (Gallopín, 2006). Therefore, practitioners from different disciplines use different meanings and concepts of vulnerability, which ultimately led to diverse methods of defining and measuring. The differences in concepts of vulnerability among the various disciplines can be explained by their interest to focus on different components of risk, household responses to risk and welfare outcomes. The disciplines include geography, economics, food security, asset-based and sustainable livelihoods, sociology, anthropology, disaster management, environmental science, and health and nutrition (Alwang, et al., 2001).

Vulnerability can be personal or individual level both in spatial and non-spatial realms. Social vulnerability includes susceptibility of social groups or society to potential losses from extreme events and the ability to absorb and withstand its impacts (Emrich and Cutter, 2011).

Government Palliative distribution

At the onset of the covid 19 virus, the federal government of Nigeria promised palliative measures in form of conditional cash transfer for about 3.6 million vulnerable citizens: However, the distribution was faced with loads of challenges.

Initially, the narration of who the vulnerable were was raised. However, the government clarified that the eligibility criteria for this measure included community leaders and their families and individuals whose bank balance was less than US\$13. This further heightened the tension as there were not enough matrices to ascertain individuals whose bank balance were less than US\$13 as that was the case of most Nigerian citizen who perhaps had not made any form of income at that period. Also, there was not enough data to classify individuals who met these criteria.

Also, the strategy of distributing the palliatives based on states whose indigenes engage in wealth development through tax payment was described as a fruitless effort ((The Nigerian Guardian Newspaper Report, April 17, 2020b). In addition, according to a Nigeria newspaper report, ‘Lamentation still trails Nigeria, FG’S palliative package as intermediaries hijack the program (Business Day on April 19, 2020). According to the report, there was lamentation and wailings in many parts of Nigeria as there were complaints that the palliative packages were hijacked by intermediaries. They went further to lament that the stimulus package announced by the governments was being politicized (Eranga, 2020; Business Day Report April, 19, 2020).

The unfair distribution to the targeted population caused violence and threats to protests in different states if the Federal Government of Nigeria as it was alleged that the government used the avenue for their corrupt practice of embezzling public funds.

The combination of all these rendered the scheme largely ineffective and caused a violation of the human right and lockdown directive (Adesanaya, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted prospect theory as its theoretical connection between covid 19 and palliative distribution among vulnerable people in Nigeria. [Tversky and Kahneman; \(1992\)](#) affirm that prospect theory becomes relevant and useful for decision making during uncertainty. It is often an advantage to present situation positively than on a negative term ([Craighead et al., 2020](#)), which leads to the selection of riskier options. Prospect theory facilitates prediction into the near future about how a manager will react under a pandemic situation.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the qualitative research design. The data collection method

emphasised secondary sources and the method of analysis was mainly qualitative and critical. This was necessary as the study essentially made use of documentary analysis. Relevant scholarly publications were extensively sourced from journal articles and the internet. Data analysis was based on the iterative approach in recognition of the constant and dialectical interaction between economic and political forces in shaping human societies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Vulnerability, Palliative and COVID-19 Threats in Nigeria-

The study aimed to explore the factors that made COVID-19 a threat, and the effectiveness of palliative to vulnerable people in Nigeria. On February 27th, 2020, the first official case of COVID-19 in Nigeria was announced. Amzat, et al (2020) —noted that during the first 30 days of COVID-19 in Nigeria, the disease distribution was thought to be for the privileged populations only.

Differently, Kalu (2020) stated that Nigeria, just as with the rest of the world, was facing the realities of COVID-19 crisis, but in a somewhat different fashion largely due to the seeming shocks being witnessed by the government. UNDP gave a good description of these shocks; first was the shock from decline in oil prices by more than 55% between the end of 2019 to March 2020, which was one of the most serious economic shocks that Nigeria had faced in its memory, especially as the oil sector contributed 65% and 90% to government and total export revenues, respectively. Another shock was due to lack of demand which reduced domestic oil supply, which further limited the ability of government to cope with the pandemic. Furthermore, disruption occurred to supply chain distributions due to restrictions of movement. Worse still, exchange rate (naira) came under severe pressure as the rate depreciated by 1.0% since mid-February 2020. Also, inflation rate was raised due to shortage of consumer

goods in the event of disruptions to imports and local supply, particularly as Nigeria was a net importer of basic foodstuff. Notably still, was the initial panic buying even when prices and supply of goods were unaffected, and significant job losses were recorded.

Interestingly, Kalu (2020) affirmed that the health system in Nigeria before the pandemic was nearly non-existent; noting that even in most of the cities, health systems were completely dilapidated as they have not received adequate attention; and those political leaders contributed to health system collapse by encouraging medical tourism among the ruling class and few capable individuals leaving the vulnerable people in a severe condition.

Similarly, Amzat, et al., (2020), observed that public health education in Nigeria was vague, which account for the medico-centric and reactionary response to the COVID-19 in Nigeria as the federal and state governments only set up isolation centres after positive cases were confirmed in the country.

Conclusion

The overall intention of the study was to examine the effects of covid 19 palliative on the vulnerable in Nigeria. The study adopted the qualitative and critical approach and the prospect theory as its theoretical framework. The key thrust of the prospect theory is to facilitate predictions into the near future during an uncertainty situation. The study essentially adopted qualitative approach. Critical method was also employed. In recognizing the difficulty associated with the preventive measures, the Federal Government promised palliative measures in conditional cash transfer, foodstuffs among others. This research found out that the aspect affected during the lockdown was the finance, and the palliative, which was meant to cushion the effect, was hoarded, hijacked, and ineffectively distributed. The results from the study indicated that the gap in infrastructure

delivery especially healthcare facilities stood out to worsen COVID-19 crisis among the vulnerable Nigerians. The results also revealed that the political elites viewed COVID-19 palliative as opportunity to help themselves rather than given needed support to the vulnerable people. The study concluded that COVID-19 palliatives tended to develop the pockets of the political elites at the expense of the targeted vulnerable people. To ensure that the situation do not worsen for both the privileged and the less-privileged households, the political elites in Nigeria need to focus on the well-being of the citizens.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. It is recommended that since Nigeria's health care systems are yet to attain the global standard, she should endeavour to fix it rather than building new ones and never maintain the already existing facilities, which is one of the major problems in Nigeria.
- ii. Political leaders should increase consultation, aim at genuinely protecting its citizens, and provide them with the necessary commodities or funds as palliatives without compromising the process.
- iii. The vulnerable people should adopt a survival mindset and develop interest in backyard gardening to serve as additional nutrients to meet their daily household dietary needs to reduce the overdependence on government.

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