CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC: THE ROLES OF LIBRARIES IN COMBATING THE MENACE AND MISINFORMATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Purpose: *This paper examines the menace of coronavirus diseases in relation to how libraries can contribute their own quota in curbing the spread of the disease especially in rural areas.*

Design*: An exploratory method was used to identify the global information about coronavirus, its spread, global statistics of coronavirus rate and in Nigeria, devastating effect on the Nigerian economy, misinformation about it, factors that can promote the spread and the roles of libraries in combating it in the world especially in Nigeria.*

Findings*: The paper found out that coronavirus is a disease that is contagious which has resulted in many deaths across the globe. However, the spread is slower in Africa (Nigeria) than in other countries of the world like China where it originated, Italy and United States of America. It is a disease that is related to respiratory tract like cold yet causes devastating effects on economy. There abounds misinformation about the virus which incited fear, panic and anxiety in many however libraries can publicize trusted information about it to guide people.*

Originality/value*: The originality of this works lies in its clear identification of misinformation about coronavirus and websites that librarians can direct their clienteles in order to access valid information about the virus.*

Key words: *Coronavirus, COVID-19, Libraries, Health Sectors, Pandemic diseases, Misinformation, Roles of libraries, Rural Areas, Nigeria*

Introduction

In the past, the world achieved success in globalization in terms of socio-economic benefits however they never expected that there would be a global pandemic which would take away millions of life. This global pandemic is the attack of a virus which the cure has not been found and it is known as coronavirus. Coronavirus has been spreading across national borders and cultures for many months now and has affected over 110 nations in the world and it is still spreading. Sometime in December 2019 a new virus known as coronavirus or COVID-19 outbreak took the world by surprise in Wuhan, China's Republic. As at March 16, 2020, more than 153,000 people were confirmed to have the virus globally in over 100 countries mostly in China and Italy (WHO, 2020). This virus has not been previously identified in humans but human to human transmission has now been confirmed. Chinese Ministry of Health are yet to determine the actual origin of the disease, they assumed that the virus likely comes from seafood market in Wuhan where illegal wide life was traded. Chinese researchers also assumed that the virus spread from an infected animal species to humans via illegally trafficked pangolins, which may likely be bats or snakes as the most likely source of this virus (WHO, 2020). People infected with the virus experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment while old people, suffering from diseases such as cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases can contact the virus easily (www.WHO.int\health-topics\coronavirus). Other health issues that have befallen the world since 2005 include swine flu in 2009, Polio in 2004, Zika in 2016 and Ebola in 2019.

According to the World Health Organization WHO (2020), coronavirus rages through the world and spreads rapidly in the United States of America; Africa is the least-affected continent at the moment, with less than 300 reported cases in roughly half of its 54 countries so far (Penny, 2020). However, in Nigeria, the continent's largest country by population, investments in laboratory capacity and coordination with the World Health Organization (WHO) for testing have paid dividends. "Over the last three years, we have strengthened capacity at our National Reference Laboratory to provide molecular diagnosis for all epidemic prone diseases and highly infectious pathogens," (Ihekweazu, 2020). In Nigeria at first, the disease is spreading slowly, very few cases have been noticed and all have turned on to be negative. However, at present thousands of people are infected while more laboratories are established such as NCDC National Reference Laboratory, Virology Laboratory of Lagos University Teaching Hospital, Irrua Specialist Teaching Hospital, Nigerian Institute of Medical Research, and African Centre of Excellence for Genomics of Infectious Disease (Ihekweazu, 2020).

All of these are in the NCDC MOLECULE network and librarians and libraries are expected to play a leading role in acquiring, processing, interpreting, repackaging, and disseminating relevant up-to-date, timely information and knowledge resources both from within and beyond their localities (Kargbo, 2014). Librarians via vast disseminating information tools available to them are in a position to stop the spread of coronavirus and misinformation using such tools as library websites, churches, mosques, and market places through the market authorities.

Library and Misinformation

It is one of the cardinal roles of the libraries to disseminate accurate information to the masses. Primarily, library identifies, selects, acquires, organizes, and provides information resources in the right formats for prompt dissemination at all times to various stakeholders. It is the duty of the library to give accurate information on coronavirus pandemic that would help in combating the spread the disease. Everylibrary (2020) on its resources for libraries on coronavirus argues that the comparisons between coronavirus and the flus have gone beyond hand washing and entered the zone of conspiracy theories and misinformation. It has been observed that some website and social media posted that coronavirus is a hoax, nothing more than a common cold or flu being elevated for political purposes. There was an article posted in social media that coronavrius does not affect black Africans, it is a Whiteman sickness, Some suggested that it cannot survive in a hot weather such as in Africa. On the other hand, some of these websites have suggested cure or preventive measures not backed by research or medical support. For example, some of these website and social media posted that salt can be used to cure coronavirus. According to Munsanje (nd) "it takes the efforts of various stakeholders to fight this including the press both public and private". Since librarians cannot reach everyone, there is need to investigate and make useful suggestion on how to fight this vice.

Facebook is not left out of the current situation to curb the effect of misinformation on coronavius. Hotmarker (2020) noted that "In an effort to disseminate trustworthy health information on COVID-19, Facebook will roll out its own coronavirus information center, a central hub on the vast social network where the company will collect information from sources like the CDC and WHO". Similarly, "Facebook-owns WhatsApp, an infamous hotbed of hard-to-track misinformation, also added its own coronavirus info hub."

Misinformation can cause greater harm than good especially on the area of the spread of coronavirus.

The Statistics of Coronavirus Rate in Nigeria

Coronavirus having been identified as a global epidemic caused by a group of viruses that cause respiratory tract illness spreads rapidly if unchecked or if precautionary measures are not taken by both individuals, health workers and the government. An update on the statistics of coronavirus globally in February 28, 2020 shows eighty four thousand and seventy seven (84,077) cases in fifty two (52) countries which has resulted in two thousand, eight hundred and seventy six (2,876) deaths (7%) while thirty six thousand, two hundred and forty one (36, 241) representing (82%) are in mild condition and eighty thousand, and eighty seven are in severe conditions regarded as critical (Obinna, 2020). As at April 2, 2020, 896,450 people were confirmed with the virus globally while 45,526 deaths were recorded and 195 countries of the world affected (Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, 2020b). Globally in July 2020, there are 14,562,550 confirmed cases of COVID- 19 including 607,781 deaths (WHO, 2020). In Nigeria, the number has risen to 36,663 confirmed cases, 20,769 active cases, 15,105 discharged cases and 789 deaths in Nigeria (Nigeria Center for Disease Control).

However, in Nigeria, the index case was an Italian form Milan, Italy who came for a short business transaction in Lagos and Ogun states (Emoriken, 2020). The Italian boarded a flight (Turkish Airline) with 148 people to Lagos and only 55 passengers on flight with the Italian were found and were quarantined but none manifested any coronavirus symptoms (Emoriken, 2020). As at (March 18, 2020), there are 2 confirmed cases of coronavirus in Nigeria in Ogun and Lagos states according to National Centre for Disease Control (2020a). As at April 2, 2020, there are 184 confirmed cases in Nigeria which affected 13 states; 20 (11%) out of the 184 confirmed cases have been discharged, 162 (88%) are on treatment while 2(1%) death are recorded (Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, 2020b). Currently as at July 20, 2020, the statistics of coronavirus rate in Nigeria are as follows: confirmed cases – 36,663; active cases – 20, 769; discharged cases – 15,105 and death – 789. This shows increase in the rate of its spread.

Coronavirus Devastating Impact on Development in Nigeria

The outbreak of viral disease such as COVID-19 affects national development negatively. Fear, anxiety and panic are created in the lives of many while business transactions especially importation of goods and services are closed. Nigerian government mapped out funds which could have been used for national development in procuring health facilities in some hospitals and health centers in readiness of the outbreak of the contagious disease (Ajayi, 2020). In addition, isolation centers at states that have international airports were built and equipped; such states include: FCT, Lagos, Rivers, Enugu and Kano (Obinna, 2020). The fund utilized in building and equipping those centres would have been used for other developmental projects.

There is fear that coronavirus is impacting negatively the oil sector in Nigeria. Eboh (2020) reported that coronavirus affected oil sector which is the main sources of revenue generation in Nigeria. In January, 2020, the prices of crude oil averaged $63.51 for Brent, $64.05 for Bonny, and $58.29 per barrel for WTI. This shows a decline when compared with the average prices in December 2019 which is $67.02, $65.94 and $60.67 per barrel for the three respectively. Furthermore, the decline became worse on February, 2020 as the three averaged $57.17, $57.14 and $52.86 per barrel each. These declines in the prices of crude oil show that the spread of coronavirus is

impacting negatively in the demand and sell of crude oil in the international market.

The boarders are closed and Nigerians banned from travelling to those countries affected by coronavirus. This resulted slight inflation in prices of goods and commodities at the market which if prolonged would be worse as lockdown was declared in many affected states which have resulted in great economic losses. Akanni and Gabriel (2020) pointed out that the global demand for oil was affected by lockdown in many countries and it resulted in reduction and slowdown of global economy.

Factors that can promote the Spread of Coronavirus in Nigeria

Many factors can contribute to the spread of coronavirus especially in Nigeria as a developing country. These factors include ignorance, superstitious beliefs and primitive practices, poor infrastructural facilities especially in rural areas, over population and overcrowding in urban areas, mass poverty rate and poor hygiene, and poor health care delivery.

Ignorance: Ignorance connotes lack of information, knowledge and understanding about something (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). The psychologists refer ignorance as a blind spot for something. People that are not informed properly about coronavirus, its consequences and preventive measures are likely to become victims of the epidemic disease especially during the outbreak. As a result of that, educating and spreading information through diverse ways in order to dispel ignorance becomes vital to curb down the spread of coronavirus.

Superstitious Beliefs and Primitive Cultural Practices: The belief systems of people affect the way they respond to different things including epidemic diseases such as coronavirus. Superstitious beliefs and primitive cultural practices abound more in developing countries than in developed countries due to

under development. Archibong, Enang and Bassey (2017) found out in their research about witchcraft beliefs in disease causation and health seeking behavior in pregnancy of women in Calabar South, Nigeria that cultural practices largely influence people's health and access to modern health care facilities in Nigeria. A large number of people believe in myths and legends rather than modern practices of health care and service delivery. This factor can as well promote the spread of coronavirus as people may not adhere to the instruction given for prevention of the spread of the epidemic disease such as social distancing, regular washing of hands, the use of hand sanitizers, improved personal hygiene's and reporting to hospital personnel in case of fever, cough and headache.

Poor Infrastructural Facilities: Poor infrastructural facilities can promote the spread of coronavirus. Infrastructural facilities include: pipe borne water, electricity, good roads, good hospitals and health care service delivery etc. However, in Nigeria many rural areas lack these basic facilities that life demands. Many people do not have access to pipe borne water; they had to walk many kilometers to fetch a little keg of water for cooking, drinking and laundry. It is stated that one of the preventive methods of spreading coronavirus is by washing of hands with soap and water regularly. Despite the fact that water is important, many people do not have access to pipe borne water. The same is applicable to good hospitals and health care service delivery, electricity and good roads.

Over Population and Overcrowding in Urban Areas: Nigeria is known to be the largest country in Africa with the highest concentration of the blacks. The population is estimated to be about 193,392,517 in 2016 (National Population Commission as cited in National Bureau of Statistics, 2017). In addition, there is always massive migration from rural areas to urban cities. As a result of that, may people are living at congested places without enough ventilation,

and apartments overcrowded by people. Coronavirus is known as a respiratory tract disease which can be contracted by droplets from the victim's nose especially if sneezes occur. Therefore, overcrowding and overpopulation can lead to the spread of the disease.

Mass Poverty Rate and Poor Hygiene: The poverty rate in Nigeria is quite alarming. Poverty is determined by lack of the necessary things that life demands. There is mass poverty rate in Nigeria as a result of unemployment, underutilization of resources etc. The basic things needed to guide against coronavirus include improved hygiene which can be achieve by procurements of protective wears like face masks, latex gloves, hand sanitizers and antibacterial wipes. However, because of mass poverty rate in Nigeria many people may not afford them and these can lead to poor hygiene which can promote the spread of coronavirus disease.

Poor Health Care Delivery: Poor health care refers to lack of adequate and quality health care delivery; poor quality services in health sectors can hinder people from accessing heath care services anytime they want it. Public health is vital for national health security as well as tracking and monitoring outbreaks of diseases such as coronavirus. Nigeria is lacking developed health care system with inadequate and non functional surveillance (Osain, 2011). People still pay much more in order to get adequate health care needed.

The Roles of Libraries on Reducing the Spread of Coronavirus

Libraries irrespective of the type are information centers. Traditionally, libraries acquire information resources, organize and disseminate for people to read. Libraries can educate the populace on coronavirus epidemic disease through outreach programs to the rural areas, information repackaging, acquisition of

materials on coronavirus control measures, dissemination of such information through social media and display at libraries, organizing forums for sensitization of the populace about coronavirus, operating mobile library services in rural areas on the subject, organizing seminars and workshops on coronavirus etc.

Outreach Programs: Outreach programs are targeted at taking information to the target audience in places and not necessarily waiting for people to visit the library in order to obtain information. Male Kani, and Bernard (2018) argued that the aim of outreach programs is to increase access to information services, education of the populace, and direct delivery of information. Information can be any relevant fact, data or idea or assemblage of data of useful purpose communicated with the aim of addressing, influencing or eliciting response that is capable of development (Edoka, 2000 and Echezona, 2005). Through outreach programs issues on coronavirus would be communicated to people at market places, worship centers and schools especially at rural areas by librarians.

Information Repackaging: Information repackaging is "the presentation of information in a more understandable, reliable, acceptable and usable forms" (UNESCO cited in Okoroma 2014). This can be done by presenting the information in another format in order to disseminate it to the target audience. Information repackaging offers opportunities of translating information to different languages and making them more specific and concise to suit the target audience. According to Everylibrary(2020), one of the biggest roles that libraries can fill in the national response to COVID-19 is that of information literacy specialists. Librarians are in better positions to help their clients understand the medical terminology being used .and can break them down into local languages for their clienteles.

Acquisition of Materials on Coronavirus Control Measures: Libraries irrespective of the type

acquire information materials to meet the varying information needs of users. Nnadozie as cited in Quadri, and Onaolapo (2018) explained that through acquisition, information materials in different forms are added to the library in order to provide effective library services. Information materials that deal with issues such as how to protect the body from contagious diseases like coronavirus can be acquired by libraries and displayed at strategic places in the library for users to read up.

Information Dissemination through Social Media: Social media has been useful for information dissemination while library services have also gone beyond traditional to electronic method of disseminating information. Social Media is also a wide interactive platform that employs mobile and web based technology in order to enable people or users to create, share, and co-create contents as well as discussing and modifying generated contents (Kietzmanm, Silverstre, McCarthy & Leyland, 2012 cited in Lawson et. al. 2016: 261). Different social media platforms can be used to disseminate information on coronavirus in order to educate the populace and also curb the spread by librarians. Cohen (2015) and Mangold and Faulda (2014) identified them as facebook, linkedln, Google+, WordPress, Social News, Wikipedia, wikia, Wikis, vimeo, Twitter, Digg, Flickr, Pinterest, Video sharing, YouTube, Live-Streaming, Periscope, Blab, Micro blogging, blogger, tumbr, Live Journal, Photo sharing, Content Curation, Paper-Li, and Reddit.

Provision of Trusted Information Sites about COVID-19 to the Populace: There are lots of websites for all sort of information on the care and prevention of coronavirus in the world. Libraries can publish resources and information through this websites, the recommended websites that are linked to the centers for diseases control, world Health organization, and in Nigeria to Nigeria Centre for Disease Control. The recommended websites include:

- Kalaqmazoo (MI) publicLibrary (https://www.kpi.gov/about/news/coronavirus-information-and-prevention).
- Lexington (SC) public Library (https;excolibrary.com/com/coronavirus/).
- North Central (WA) Regional Library (https//www.ncrl.org/blog/coronavirus.
- jounalGeorgetownUniversity.coronavirus(COVID-19)Resources enter(https;www.georgetown.edu/coronavirus/).
- The University of Iowa "oronavirus ICOVID-19Iguide to information sources (https;//guildes.lib.ulowa.edu/coronavirus) 'and
- In Nigeria, National Commission for Disease Control at https;//www.ncdc.gov,ng.

In addition to the above almost 100 core academic journals, societies, institutions, and companies have agreed and signed a commitment to provides research and data on COVID-19 freely during the duration of the current pandemic(Libguildees.Libray.drexel.edu/COVID19. All these provide information on the symptoms, preventive actions and updates about the impact of this virus in the world.

Organizing Forums, Seminars and Workshops: Librarians can organize professional and interactive forums, seminars and workshops in order to share knowledge on how libraries can effective help to educate the populace about epidemic, contagious illness such coronavirus. There are two recognized professional forums for librarians in Nigeria: the Nigerian Library Association of Nigeria and the Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria. They organize seminars and workshops for librarians to be better equipped in face of challenges in the global world.

Operating Book Mobile or Mobile Library Services: Bookmobile can be useful for reaching people in rural areas in order to educate them about coronavirus. Bashaw (2015) sees bookmobile or mobile library as a vehicle for taking library information materials including internet to expected readers. In Nigeria, library materials can be taken to remote areas where there are no internet access and accessible roads through camels and donkeys. However, there are other rural areas with accessible roads, library materials can be conveyed through buses while engine boats can be used to take materials to remote river line areas. Those information materials that can enlighten them on coronavirus and infectious diseases control measures in different forms can be transported for their education.

Recommendations

For the mere facts that coronavirus pandemic can be controlled by disseminating information on its transmission and prevention library should:

1. Hold exhibitions on the scourge of COVID-19, its prevention and where to go for test and possibly where to go and buy prescribed drugs.

2. Libraries should in conjunction with advocacy groups extend this important campaign to remote areas and villages by providing oral and written information in local languages in this case, one should ensure that the correct information is given to the local community who may not have the opportunity of receiving correct and adequate coronavirus information.

3. Another main source for the provision of COVID-19 information by libraries is by oral information tradition (word-of-mouth or hearsay). This is the traditional form in which knowledge was transmitted and in literate or semi-literate communities market place or churches and mosques should be included.

4. The traditional rulers are very close to the people, nothing stops the librarians from passing COVID-19 information via this source. The traditional rulers are well respected in Nigeria. People will listen to them and will always agree with their opinions.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the libraries can play a very important role in acquiring, interpreting, repackaging and dissemination of pertinent information on coronavirus pandemic. In the battle against the COVID-19, libraries are expected to be at the forefront in providing needed information for combating the spread of the disease. They should recognize the urgent need to quickly share accurate information about COVID-19. Librarians are also using new sources such as WHO myth busting questions and answers on the COVID- 19. There is no doubt that libraries can help reduce the widespread misinformation on the pandemic by giving fact and figure on COVID epidemic. The library can reach out to partner with health authorities and see how they can support accurate disseminate of information on COVID-19.

As professionals mostly concerned with dissemination of information including health care information for everybody including at – risk populations such as those with disabilities, those in rural areas with very limited means of communication, those with little or no education and those in poverty. All the above mentioned risk-population can easily contract diseases such as COVID-19. Government at all levels can fund public health sectors while librarians stay updated on the latest information on prevention and care for COVID-19 pandemic.

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