

# **COVID—19 RESPONSES IN NIGERIA AND THE PREPAREDNESS OF THE TRADITIONAL AND CULTURAL HEALTH CARE DELIVERY TO COMBATING THE PANDEMIC: THE NEED FOR THE GUIDNANCE AND COUNSELLING COLLABORATION.**

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## **Abstract**

COVID-19 pandemic has been responded to by the whole world in general and Nigeria particularly in various complex measures. There has been the request for vaccination, and consistent need for precautions including the sit at home or lockdown measures. In all these responses, the virus is said to have returned back, in a more severe and deadly spread. The second wave has reactivated the world's mind to insist on a vaccine. Presently, vaccines are said to be available, but reasonable number of Nigerians have put up questions and suspicion against these vaccines. On this point, no body has challenged the natural, traditional and cultural health care delivery measures applied by many Nigerians including residents of the rural settlements. It is this fear and argument on the use of COVID-19 vaccine and contemporary Nigerian people's disregard to traditional and cultural health care delivery systems that form the problem that this paper is designated to address. Be that as it may, African traditional medical and health care systems should be acknowledged in the quest for a therapy for the treatment or management of the pandemic. Even though traditional healthcare systems have their deficiencies, the research is nevertheless is designed to examine the effectiveness of the African traditional and cultural health care systems as an alternative to the use of vaccine among Nigerians. It is also discovered that the disagreement between Nigerians on the use of vaccines and reliability of African health care systems call for the involvement of the guidance and counseling experts. The research adopts comparative and phenomenological research approaches. Data collected were analyzed with phenomenological method of analysis. Data were also sourced from primary and secondary sources. It is recommended that government should look into the complaints against vaccines, and effectiveness of African traditional health care system before making decisions on the use of the vaccines, etc.

**Keywords: COVID-19, Vaccines, African Traditional/Cultural Health Care Systems, Guidance and Counseling, Pandemic and Nigeria.**

## **Introduction**

The entire world has responded to COVID-19 with several laid down guides and lockdown of major human activities in the world throughout March 2020 to early 2021 in the management or treatment of the virus, there had been opinions and counter opinions for and against the use of certain drugs in treating or managing affected patients. Isolation centers were also set aside for proper management of victims. In 2021, there is the speculation that the second wave of the virus has begun thereby necessitating the introduction of vaccines or vaccination. Among Nigerians, the use of vaccines has been challenged by reasonable number of the people, including the literate and illiterate individuals. The typical uneducated Nigerians reject the vaccination exercise as an unnecessary plan because they believe that the virus does not exist at all. But the formally educated ones argue from the point of certification of the chemical content of the vaccines produced for the vaccination. This group of individuals argues among other things that virus is hardly prevented or controlled by the use of vaccines or vaccination. The most frequent question they always ask is: "Why has HIV/AIDS existed without any vaccine or vaccination? This bothers on the fear that whatever vaccine that could be introduced would do more harm than good. These fear and argument have given rise to the problem this research is designed to handle.

The modern people also rely on modern medicine so much that they disregard traditional and cultural health care delivery system. Therefore, another problem that bothers this research is that, since the modern people do not have regard to traditional and cultural health care delivery system what would be the preparedness of traditional and cultural health care delivery system in combating the pandemic? It is on this background that Asso. Prof Ituma E. Anya (Personal communication, 11 May, 2020) said that religious faith had been a barrier against people's patronage to traditional medical system. He acknowledges the effectiveness of African traditional medicine or health care delivery and the clear difference between Christianity, African Traditional Religion and the traditional and cultural health care delivery system. Therefore, religious attachment is one of the contributory factors to modern people's disregard to traditional and cultural health care system. African traditional medicine and healthcare delivery system have their weaknesses, accruing from their lack of dosage, unhygienic, unscientific practices etc, but in any case, African traditional medical and health care delivery systems ought to be regarded and acknowledged in the search for a therapy for the treatment or management of the COVID-19 pandemic. On this basis, the research aims at examining the efficacy of the African traditional and cultural health care delivery system, which can serve as an alternative to the adoption of vaccine or vaccination among Nigerians. It is found in the research that the disagreement between Nigerians on the use of vaccines and reliability of African health care delivery system would require the involvement of guidance and counseling experts. This paper adopts comparative and phenomenological research method. Data used in the research work were gathered from primary and secondary sources. It is recommended amidst other things that government should look into the

complaints against COVID-19 vaccines, and effectiveness of African traditional health care delivery system before making decisions on the use of the vaccines.

### Clarification of Terms

The concepts that are given some explanations or definitions include: **COVID-19, vaccine, African traditional cultural health care systems, guidance and counseling, pandemic** and **Nigeria**. The virus **COVID-19** has been explained by World Health Organization in Okafor (2020:305) thus:

COVID-19 is the name given by the WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION/WHO on February 11, 2020 for the disease caused by the novel corona virus SARS/COV2 it started in Wuhan, China in late 2019 and has since spread worldwide. COVID-19 is an acronym that stands for coronal virus disease of 2019. Historically on December 31, 2019 a strange new pneumonia of unknown cause was reported to the Chinese case or country office. A Chester of these case originally appeared in Wuhan ...

China and COVID-19 is a respiratory infection that originated from Wuhan, has gone round the world disturbing, virtually all aspects of human livelihood. It is clear that COVID-19 is a respiratory disease. Africans, traditionally had measures of tackling respiratory health issues.

**Vaccine** in a general sense could be conceived as preventive medicine. Summers (2001:1585) defines vaccine as: “a substance which contains the virus that cause a disease and is used to protect people from that disease”. Vaccine serves as a substance that protects the body against the same virus that causes a disease. **African traditional and cultural health care system** is a concept that affiliates itself with African traditional medicine and other cultural ways of promoting health in African settings. Mume (1984:204) explains traditional medicine thus:

Traditional medicine has been designed as an art, science, philosophy and practice following definite natural, biological, chemical, mental and spiritual laws for the restoration and maintenance of health and the correction of bodily disorders... the practitioner of traditional medicine himself with what constitutes good moral living learns to detect by spiritual diagnostic signs, how, when and where departure from the normal or natural has taken place ...

In the practice of traditional medicine in the present days, it is not all health issue that are spiritually diagnosed. In some cases, empirical laboratory diagnoses are done while the traditional medical practitioners administer the appropriate herbs, roots etc. But in a situation where the illness defies treatment, spiritual diagnoses in form of divinations are done to know if the cause of the disease can be unveiled or revealed. From the information above, one observes that for the traditional Igbo, sickness or illness is deviation from the natural, from the normal bodily cosmic

harmony, (health/life) the intricate connecting forces that operate in a web-like fashion must be discerned and normalized (Madu, 2004:26-27). Traditional medicine does not end at the pure medical treatment to correct deviation from normal or natural body state, and cosmic harmony connected to spiritual forces. It includes other African traditional and cultural practices that are medicinal. For example, consumption of certain foods, fruits, vegetables, ointments, and other healthy cultural practices. In summary, African traditional and cultural healthcare system could be said to be all the traditional and cultural medical administration management and practices involving supernatural forces, empirical process, and medicinal habitual practices of the traditional and cultural African peoples to return to normal or natural state of the body from this deviation in human life or health.

**Guidance and counseling** is presently a field of study in academia. Traditionally, among Africans, guidance and counseling was a responsibility of elders to children in various African communities. Parents guide and counsel their children, but the African traditional society believes that every child is for everybody's guidance and counseling because every child is expected to attend to the service of the adult members of the society, even though they are not their parents. This is why the Igbo apply the adage "*Nwabunwa Ora*". Every child should assist any adult member of his immediate community on errand. More so, every adult or elder owes the child, the responsibility of guiding and counseling him on the right ways to behave, and at the same time assists the child as the case may be, on material needs. But in this context, guidance and counseling is viewed from a professional view point. **Counseling**, according to Akinade (2006:4) can be professionally defined as: "... a profession that strive to assist individuals called counselees to resolve their peculiar challenges, concerns, difficulties, worries or doubts in diverse areas of their lives such as in academics, careers, and socio-personal matters". Okonkwo and Nnamha (2016:81) see counseling as "the application of mental health, physiological or human development principles through cognitive, effective behavioural or systematic strategies that address wellness, personal growth, or career development as pathology". In the context of the need for guidance and counseling in this paper, comprehensive information on causes and effects of COVID-19 or the corona virus and vaccines are very pivotal as regards its pathology from standard medical and disease information from research experts. **Guidance** itself is not too far from counseling, it is more of guide.

**Nigeria** on the other hand is one of the most populous countries at least in Africa. Nigeria has been discussed by Princeton (2020:2) thus:

Nigeria, officially the Federal Republic of Nigeria, is a federal constitutional republic comprising 36 states and its Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The country is located in West Africa and shares land borders with the Republic of Benin in the West, Chad and Cameroon in the east, and Niger in the north. Its coast in the south lies on the Gulf of Guinea

on the Atlantic Ocean. There are over 500 ethnic groups in Nigeria of which three largest ethnic groups are the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba..

Nigeria is regarded as the Giant of Africa. Her flag colour symbols are Green, White, Green and a Coat of Arm with Eagle and Two Horses among other designs. **Pandemic** according to Summers (2001:1023) is: "...an illness or disease that affects the population of a large area". **COVID-19** spread from Asia, particularly China to the rest of the countries of the world. It seems to be the most pandemic disease in the history of the world. The corona virus called COVID-19 has broken the world history in terms of its speed of spreading and places it extended its deadly arms. The implication of this definition is that pandemic might not affect the whole world but when a case affects a reasonable number of people in different parts of the world, it could be termed pandemic.

### **Traditional Health Care Delivery in the midst of Contemporary People's Views in Combating COVID-19: The Need for Guidance and Counseling**

Frankly speaking, the response of Nigerians to emergence of the pandemic has been very poor. The poor attention to the virus in Nigeria could be attributed to so many factors. The suspected factors include: belief system (superstition, religion or faith), cultural perception, attitude of the leading major stakeholders. Majority of Nigerians find it difficult to be protective against the pandemic. The only avenues in which most Nigerians are forced to respond very well on guidelines are on their visit to banks, official and well secured gatherings or meetings, academic physical examinations, lectures, seminars etc. But generally speaking, Nigerians response to COVID-19 is very poor. At a time when transportation routes are opened, the simple rule on passengers seating arrangement is not honoured among commercial/public and private motorists. Okafor et al (2020:311) have condemned the attitude of Nigerians; both the government and other major stakeholders on the management of COVID-19 saga in Nigeria when they lament that distribution and sharing of little foodstuff given to the poor masses was so appalling. In a situation whereby fellow citizens were suffering, high profile members of the same country who were entrusted with the task to share palliatives still hoard, or hide reasonable quantity and parts of the relief material shows a very poor response to their brothers' agony created by COVID-19.

On the other side of the coin, some civilized people and some elites in Nigeria do not regard or honour traditional and cultural health care delivery system. One of the causes of such disregard to African traditional medicine is that Africans historically conceived that disease and illness was embedded in "witchcraft". Abdullahi (n.d:5) emphasizes that "... the conception of diseases and illness in Africa, was historically embedded in "witchcraft", where, in Western knowledge, witchcraft reinforces "backwardness", "superstition" and "dark continent". The practice of witchcraft had been in existence in the Western world, yet it truly forms insignificantly, a part of the suspicions against African traditional medicine and healthcare delivery systems. Madu (2004:24) is of the view that: "...the

tradimedicalists claim to cure all disease (*Ogwo nnu oria*) and therefore dispense the same medicine for different ailments... Also lack of dosage of traditional medicine is another painful factor..." In most cases African medicine and health care delivery systems acknowledge that one medicine or health care delivery system cures so many illnesses. Onunwa (1990:88) adds:

In spite of the recent successes being registered by traditional medical practitioners, the system is still fraught with problems which limit its scope to compete favourably with Western orthodox medical healing. The first is that the practitioners of this ancient art still keep their therapeutic techniques and discoveries out of reach of any other person, even from professional colleagues.

Traditional medical practitioners create doubts on the authenticity of what they claim of the treatment and the genuineness of the procedure and processes of dispensing medical and health care services. These, and other factors constitute the disregard, the civilized Nigerians and elites have against traditional and cultural healthcare delivery system in Nigeria. But the traditional and cultural settings and environment have gone a long way in making success and progress ever before the arrival of COVID-19 in the Nigeria. COVID-19 is a respiratory infection, and the Nigerian traditional and cultural environment and health management life, had prepared a stronger and safer health management system which combats its scourge. Okafor (2019:68) opines that: traditional medicine is responsive in the treatment/management of tuberculosis... five nuts of wonderful kola (*Buchliolzucorialea*) when taken with warm water heal tuberculosis by destroying the germ tubercle bacillus. Kevin Onuma cited by Oladele in Madukasi (2017:49) buttresses thus:

Bitter Kola improves lung functions: Bitter kola (*Garcinia Kola*) has been used for centuries to treat chest colds in traditional medicine, but research has taken a look and found out why it is effective. A study in the 2009 issue of *The Internet Journal of Pulmonary Medicine*, performed on mice, reports of *Garcinia kola* improved respiratory function after 28 days of use of a *Garcinia* extract.

These two plants or nuts are among the substances traditionally and culturally used by Nigerians in treatment and management of lung and respiratory health cases COVID-19 itself, is a respiratory health issue. Dr. Ugochukwu Uzundu (Personal Communication, 14, June, 2020) said he contacted the virus and was confirmed positive when he went for its laboratory test in United Kingdom but as an Igbo man, who studies and was brought up in different environments in Nigeria, he decided to drink hot water always, bath with hot water, take bitter kola, ginger, garlic and honey always, within 5 days he gained the normal body state. Afterward, he went for the test again and was tested negative. Dr. Mrs. Chinenye Uzundu (Personal Communication, 18 July, 2020) stated that she had the same challenge her husband Dr. Ugochukwu Uzundu had According to her, she used the same medical and management system her husband used, but the difference was

that she was pregnant and could not take commensurate quantities of those substances her husband took, but she was healed within 8 days.

Therefore, it is agreeable that traditional foods have health benefits that can make their consumers stand the chances of getting prepared against certain diseases while they are at the same time observing some guidelines to control the disease. It could be said that Nigerian traditional and cultural health care delivery system has prepared itself against certain diseases like COVID-19 because all these plants like: ginger, garlic, bitter kola, wonderful kola, hot water, scent leaves, etc have been of both, traditional and cultural health and nutritional habit. But the problem is that modern Nigerian peoples do not attach required values to them. Okoroigwe and Nnam (2019:351) buttress thus:

Conservation of traditional foods has to do with proper management, maintenance and utilization of the resources for long term benefit of mankind. In the same way, conservation of agrobiodiversity and/or traditional foods entails wise use of indigenous foods in such a way that subsequent generations also benefit from it.

This present generation should take up the responsibility of conserving these favourable food and medical/medicinal reserves already prepared by the traditional and cultural Nigerian society.

More so, some of the symptoms of COVID-19 are shared with malaria and typhoid symptoms, for example, sneezing, cold, etc. Some traditional herbs also handle such symptoms. Agwu, et al (2019) point thus:

This research investigated the potential for *Cymbopogon citratus* (*Paoles: Poaleae*), a widely cultivated herb on tropical and subtropical gardens ... to serve as big pesticide against mosquito vectors .*C. citratus*, produces many photochemical such as phenols, alkaloids, saonins, glycosides ... *C. citratus* has various medicinal uses including the treatment for malaria, fever, nervousness, hypertension, eczema, colds, headache, stomach ache, abdominal pain ....

The herb meant here is what is commonly known as lemon grass. As it is captured here, is good for the treatment of colds. Cold is a symptom of COVID-19, cold is also respiratory barrier. With all these traditional and cultural medical/healthcare delivery awareness and its weather and climate, Nigerian traditional environment was well prepared before the arrival of COVID-19. This could be part of the reasons why Nigerians did not record much COVID-19 cases, despite Nigerians' disobedience to COVID-19 rules or guidelines. In the other parts of the world, for example, Italy, Spain, China, South Africa, etc, it was more catastrophic than Nigeria. Aja and Titilayo (2016:3) point thus:

The plant *Amaranthus* has been of longtime medicinal precursor in religious and traditional setting. *Amaranthus* is best used to treat stomach flu, diarrhea, and gastroenteritis. This herb is also useful in stopping

menstruation, and for contraception. It reduces tissue swelling caused due to sprains, and tick bites when applied externally. Leaf poultices have been implicated in treating mouth and throat inflammations, sores ...

Throat cases are linked to respiratory health problems. The leaf poultices have been found to be good in treating throat inflammation. No doubt the leaf poultices will have some remedies to subsidize COVID-19 disease. There are many traditional and cultural health practices in Nigeria. After the first wave of COVID-19, the World Health Organization later announced the arrival of the second wave. At this time, vaccines have been produced for vaccination, which should be run in stages. This sets another question for Nigerians preparedness to be vaccinated. Most people in Nigeria have objections against the vaccination. Some have criticized it through social media claiming that the contents are dangerous to human life. Some believe that it is a plan to reduce the numerical strength of Africans, etc. Some have decided to watch the effect of the vaccines on the vaccinated persons before they can decide otherwise.

It is on this basis that the guidance and counseling collaboration is needed. The opposing opinions need to be compared in addition to the prepared settings of Nigerian traditional and cultural health care delivery system, to provide a proper solution to the contradictions or confusions. Dr. Ofojebe C.C (Personal Communication, 4 February, 2021) who is a professional guidance counselor said that it is always better to allow people express themselves before counseling. On this note, he suggested the following conditions. First, the vaccine should not be made compulsory for citizens now to avoid unnecessary unrest. Secondly, all the traditional health care systems which are already on the ground should be applied to the letter pending the confirmation of the effects of the vaccines and finally, he stated that the vaccines should always be given free of charge to citizens even after the confirmation. Dr. Mrs. Chinwe Okafor (Personal Communication, 6 February, 2021) agreed with Dr. C.C Ofojebe but adds that even when the vaccines are confirmed to be very good, Nigerians must have to hold on those traditional and cultural health care delivery systems in case any other health problem which might be so disastrous occurs. If there is collaboration with guidance and counseling experts, there will better response and higher preparedness of Nigerians towards COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Recommendations**

The paper recommends the following:

1. Traditional and cultural health care system should be encouraged by the aboriginals of Nigeria contemporary society.
2. Government should equip isolation centres with both modern drugs and traditional/cultural health care measures.
3. Precautions should be more concentrated on the elderly people because they are the more vulnerable.



4. Government should also look into the complaints against vaccines and effectiveness of African traditional health care system before making further decisions on the issue of the vaccines or whatever measures that maybe introduced.
5. Government at the three tiers of government viz: Federal, State, and Local, Governments, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) Billionaires, Millionaires in Nigeria should pay responsive attention to health care delivery system by funding, equipping pragmatic monitoring of hospital activities, and building of traditional health care hospitals and centres.
6. Traditional medical and health care practitioners should pay attention to their deficiencies to enable them to make formidable successes.

**Conclusion:**

Health is wealth they say; a healthy nation is always a wealthy nation. It has been shown in this paper that the traditional medical and health care delivery systems face some challenges or weaknesses that are based on superstition, unscientific, and unhygienic practices among other things. These weaknesses have diverted the attention of Nigerians to cosmopolitan or orthodox medicine and healthcare. Nigeria with her present interest in orthodox medicine has failed to develop her traditional and cultural health care services like most countries in Asia do. On the outbreak of corona virus – COVID-19, it was very difficult to depend on countries in Europe and America to cope up against the pandemic. In Nigeria today, the neglected traditional and cultural health care delivery is seemingly becoming a cornerstone on health issues for those who are deeply observant. Again, Nigerians do not give adequate or considerable response to neither COVID-19 rules or guidelines nor the use of vaccines/vaccination. Meanwhile, Nigeria traditional and cultural health delivery has already prepared a better background for treatment and management of COVID-19, and had saved COVID-19 patients or victims. For the use of vaccines, Nigerians are averagely ready or prepared not to use the vaccines.

Finally, it has been advocated in this paper, that collaboration with guidance and counseling experts is highly needed. It is their professional directives in this article that this research uses to harmonize the differences in responses of Nigerians after making comparative evaluation of these differences. It is expected that compliance to the suggestion made, will control social unrest these disagreements can cause. It is concluded here that all these attentions put together will tackle COVID-19.

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