

## **PSYCHOLOGICAL RESOURCES AND THE MANAGEMENT OF SOCIETAL PANDEMICS IN NIGERIA: COVID-19 AS A CASE APPROACH**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study investigated the psychological resources and management of societal pandemics in Nigeria. The lockdown approach of the management of the corona virus disease (COVID-19) triggered psychological issues due to the fear of the unknown. Participants for the research were the individuals within the society that has been affected by corona virus disease. The research adopted analytical design. Secondary sources of information were explored to collect facts. Psychoanalytic theory, attribution theory, and Terror management theory were reviewed. Psychological resources found relevant in managing pandemics are psychotherapy training, psychomedia, socialization, emotional intelligence and community psychology. It is recommended for psychological resources to be harnessed in managing societal pandemics.*

**KEYWORDS:** Psychological Resources, Societal Pandemics, COVID-19

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The novel coronavirus, named as COVID-19 (Coronavirus Disease, 2019), was first detected in late December 2019 in the Wuhan province of China. It is caused by a zoonotic beta-coronavirus (SARS-CoV) and is described as being highly infectious (Zhong, 2020). It is also viewed as a relative of both Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (Sohrabi, 2020). The COVID-19 outbreak was announced as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on January 30, 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020).

Throughout human history, experience has shown that prejudices and viruses spread simultaneously during a viral pandemic. Outgroup members have been associated with various diseases and non-human vectors of diseases. Some epidemics have been named according to various outgroups, just as the novel coronavirus has been referred to by some as the “Wuhan virus” or the “Chinese virus.” Associating a virus with a sociodemographic group builds a false illusionary correlation, which can lead to stigmatization, discrimination, depression and psychological trauma.

During an epidemic of an infective disease, the mental state of the people has an important role in determining not only the extent of the epidemic but also the incidence of psychological distress and

disorder during and after the outbreak. However, psychological resources such as social support and self-confidence are important in coping and managing pandemics. Pandemics can also stimulate chronic psychological reactions. Despite notable innovation in modern medicine to eradicate pandemic diseases, infectious diseases are still one of the main causes of death and remain an ever-present threat to global humanity (Bloom & Cadarette, 2019).

There are many points where COVID-19 has differed from other pandemics, and which have resulted in increased negative effects in many areas. When compared to previous diseases such as SARS, MERSs, and even Ebola, the novel coronavirus has a lower mortality rate. However, the infection spreads far more easily and is therefore much more pervasive. The death rate from COVID-19 exceeded five times that of SARS after just 3 months (Callaway, 2020). While measures applied during almost all previous pandemics were mostly limited to rules for personal hygiene and sanitation, in the novel pandemic, localized, regional, and even national lockdowns, physical (social) distancing rules, travel restrictions, and other measures were applied almost globally; although the measures varied significantly both regionally and at the country level. One significant consequence could be considered as prolonged interruptions to face-to-face education, affecting

national and private institutions from kindergarten right through to universities. Such widespread measures result in far greater effects on mental health, intergroup and international relations, education, as well as the global economy.

These long-term lockdowns have been seen to exacerbate the differences afforded by privilege and wealth, as those without secure housing, clean drinkable water, sanitation, and reliable employment face increased vulnerability during the social/health-related measures introduced in many countries during the pandemic. Those living in impoverished conditions often lack access to appropriate medical and cleansing products, and also face inability to meet social distancing or bubble/quarantine living requirements. This is due to shared, insecure, overcrowded accommodation, or even living without any formal accommodation in unsanitary conditions. Groups such as health workers and medics have been unable, due to their professional responsibilities, to maintain the prescribed social distance from others, and have been exposed to significant levels of discrimination, even though they work under very difficult conditions for the well-being of the public at large, while facing increased personal risk. Although they have been widely praised as heroes, they have also been stigmatized, avoided, and excluded due to their being perceived as sources of infection (Taylor, 2020; World Health Organization, 2020), which was also similarly observed during previous outbreaks such as SARS (Bai, 2004).

The epidemic has caused not only significant death and serious health issues, but also severe economic, educational, psychological, and social impacts, and even international crises. Undoubtedly, one of the most “permanent” and “resistant” issues seen during this pandemic is the psychological aspect.

The novel coronavirus has also begun to be referred to by some as the “Wuhan virus” or the “Chinese virus.” This practice, which has become habitual throughout history, is known to cause fear and psychological issues. The WHO offered guidelines in order to combat this practice, emphasizing that viruses can infect all human life regardless of their location. Nevertheless, certain political figures worldwide have regularly associated COVID-19 with China, and individuals of Asian descent have been subjected to racist attacks (Nature, 2020). Ethnic outgroups are often accused of causing or helping spread pandemics, and these acts can ignite underlying psychological tendencies (Oldstone, 1998).

### **Statement of the problem**

According to Schmitt (2014), pandemics are negatively associated with psychological well-being. It is not only a violation of human rights, but also sabotages efforts to prevent the spread of the disease (Mak, 2006). In extraordinary conditions such as a pandemic, it becomes necessary to fight not only the virus but also the psychological effects. Therefore, it is vital that research and mitigation work continues in the area of infectious disease-related psychological effects.

In Nigeria, various areas have been discussed on which COVID-19 has affected, but the psychological effects caused on individuals have not been explored. Likewise, exploring psychological resources necessary in managing societal pandemics like COVID-19 has been done. COVID-19 has caused depression, anxiety, trauma and fear of the unknown, which have somehow lead to death of many. The aforementioned are all psychological issues that must be looked into. This gap in knowledge and action made this particular research very imperative and compelling. Consequently, the current research will bring into focus some psychological resources in the management of societal pandemics.

### **Objectives of the Research.**

The objectives of this research can be summarized thus:

1. To examine the psychological effects (impacts) of pandemics (COVID-19) in Nigeria.
2. To explore the psychological management resources of societal pandemics in Nigeria.
3. To proffer recommendations on how to be psychologically prepared against future pandemic challenges in Nigeria.

### **Research Questions.**

1. What psychological effects are associated with societal pandemics, like COVID-19, in Nigeria?
2. What psychological management resources are necessary during pandemics in Nigeria?
3. What recommendations will be available on how to be psychologically prepared against future pandemic challenges in Nigeria.?

### **Significance of the Research.**

This research is significant because of the following reasons:

1. The research will bring into focus the psychological effects of COVID-19 pandemics in Nigeria.

2. The research will highlight the psychological management resources for societal pandemics in Nigeria.
3. Finally, the research will proffer recommendations on how to be psychologically prepared against future pandemic challenges in Nigeria.

### Operational Definition of Terms

**Psychological resources:** These are behavioural skills that help an individual survive during a pandemic.

**Societal pandemics:** This is an outbreak of a threatening virus/diseases that is spreading rapidly.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

**Psychoanalytic Theory:** The COVID-19 pandemic created “frustration” and “deprivation” in many areas of life due to its high level of contagiousness and its impact that brought life to a near halt with severe restrictions imposed on modern societal freedoms. From the perspective of *psychoanalytic theory*, these social and individual frustrations can be the cause of fear and psychological issues. (Whitley and Kite, 2009).

**Attribution theory:** Based on the *Attribution Theory* (Heider, 1958), individuals’ attributions of the cause of disease determine their responses toward the real or perceived disease carriers and the place it emanated from. On this point, the perception of “controllability” seems strongly linked with stigma and discrimination (Weiner, 1988). Mak (2006) revealed that increased stigmatization and blaming of infected people can be observed in cases where a patient’s disease was attributable to their own carelessness or irresponsibility (internal attribution), rather than the disease being interpreted as uncontrollable (external attribution).

As a result of biased and internal attribution some persons are discriminated against due for being somehow responsible for their differences, while others are not. In a just world, everyone gets what they deserve, where “bad things happen to bad people” and “good things happen to good people” (Jost & van der Toorn, 2012). During the COVID-19 pandemic, many people evaluated the onset and spread of the outbreak in this way.

**Terror Management Theory:** Terror Management Theory (Greenberg et al., 1986) is a perspective on social motivation anchored in evolutionary theory (Buss, 1997; Greenberg and Arndt, 2012), which asserts that mortality salience increases the potential for experiencing existential anxiety. According to TMT, culture and religion

can help someone to feel a sense of control over “uncontrollable” events and thereby avoid the “unavoidable.” Mainly, they help us to cope with the reality of our being mortal. Having strong cultural worldviews, and high levels of self-esteem is seen as a way of protecting us from death-related threats like the pandemic (Kite and Whitley, 2016).

### Empirical Review

**Psychological Resources:** Yue, Zhang, Cao and Chen (2020) found that Chinese urban and rural residents held a moderate level of COVID-19 knowledge and practice and showed a positive attitude toward the disease. Pfefferbaum (2020) studies also show that patients with COVID-19 have been reported to not only experience several physical symptoms but also diverse psychological effects. Qiu, Shen, Zhao, Wang, Xie and Xu (2020) found that 5.14% of the Chinese public experienced severe mental distress associated with COVID-19.

Another Chinese online study by Wang, Pan and Wan (2020) showed that 16.5% of the general population had moderate to severe depressive symptoms and 28.8% suffered from moderate to severe anxiety symptoms due to COVID-19. As the virus spreads globally, studies on the psychological impact of the COVID-19 pandemic have proliferated among different nations (Rodríguez-Rey Garrido-Hernansaiz and Collado, 2020). An Australian nationwide survey found that the mental problems of residents during the pandemic were at least twice as high as those prior to the pandemic (Fisher, Tran & Hammarberg, 2020). Italian series of studies have reported that the COVID-19 pandemic was an important stressor comparable to traumatic events (Casagrande, Favieri, Tambelli & Forte, 2020).

**COVID-19 Societal Pandemic:** The COVID-19 has quickly turned into a pandemic, with hundreds of thousands of cases reported globally. Centre for Disease Control estimated the prevalence of COVID-19 in the US as at April 5, 2020 to be at 304,826 cases with total death of 7,616. Italy was seen as the worst hit in the global pandemic. Italian civil protection authorities as at March 13, 2020 said the number of infections has soared by more than 2,500 in 24 hours while virus-related deaths make the largest single-day jump of 250 taking the total number of infected in Italy to 17, 660 and the number of related deaths to 1,266. With Italy at the epicenter of Europe’s outbreak, the virus is now present in all 27 EU countries with more than 22, 000 cases of COVID-19 having been confirmed across Europe.

Africa is witnessing a surge in COVID-19 with North Africa having the highest cases of 6400

infections (603 deaths/1100 recoveries) as at April 13, 2020; followed by West Africa with 3400 cases (84deaths/452 recoveries), Central (38 deaths/129 recoveries) and East Africa with 1200 cases (28 deaths/187 recoveries) of infection respectively (Africa CDC, 2020). On country basis, South Africa has the highest number of infection with 2,173 cases followed by Egypt with 2,065 cases and then Algeria and morocco with 1,914 and 1,661 cases respectively (Africa CDC, 2020).

Nigeria with largest African population has recorded the infection cases of 627 (21 deaths and 170 recoveries) on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2020 (NCDC, 2020). In the year 2020, there was no known vaccine or treatment for COVID-19. Most African countries decided to adopt some precautions as directed by the WHO to contain the spread of the pandemic. Among the precautions being observed were personal hygiene practices, particularly washing hands with soap under running water, maintaining physical distance, wearing of face masks, and sneezing into your flexed arms/elbow. Africa Centre for Disease Control has also advised that people should get influenza vaccines if available in their community. At the wake of the pandemic, some countries adopted internal and local lockdowns limiting heavily movements of people and goods to prevent further spread of the virus which affected relationships and freedom of gathering. All Nigerian churches, schools, mosques and markets were closed to forestall further spread of the virus.

### METHOD

**Participants:** Participants for the research were members of the society. Interview in the course of the research revealed that members of the society show very high concern about the COVID-19. The information about these individuals' concerns were acquired from Channels TV and African Independent Television (AIT) and other secondary sources of information.

**Instrument:** The instrument of information gathering for the research were of secondary sources such as news media. This include report of individuals that were directly affected psychologically by the pandemic (COVID-19). The instrument also comprises articles, books, research and reports that were published on educational and learning platforms. Hence, the information from significant members of the society concerning the management of societal pandemics (COVID-19) were critically examined.

**Procedure:** The research focuses on Nigeria and the world at large which is currently experiencing the current pandemic (COVID-19). By implication,

any State in Nigeria that has witnessed the pandemic (COVID-19) falls within the scope of interest. For emphasizes, Nigeria is made up of 36 states with the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, also given the status of a State characterization. The procedure for the research involves examination of secondary sources of information on the current pandemic (COVID-19) in Nigeria. Critical evaluation of the secondary sources of information were done as it concerns psychological management of COVID-19.

**Design:** The design has analytical design. The analytical design is a non-empirical design in which facts and information already available are used to analyse and make critical evaluation of behavioural phenomenon. Analytical design, especially when considered with another design(s) allows a researcher to achieve creative thinking that gives insight into performance dynamics of event (Coral & Bokelmann 2017). It involves the in depth study and evaluation of available information in an attempt to explain complex social issues like the psychological resources and the management of societal pandemics which is the focus of the current research.

### FINDINGS

The following findings were made in the research.

#### Psychological Effects of COVIDS

1. Depression.
2. Anxiety.
3. Trauma.
4. Fear of the unknown.
5. Stress.
6. Mental issue
7. Death.

#### Psychological Resources in Managing Pandemics

1. Psychotherapy.
2. Psychomedia socialization.
3. Emotional intelligence.
4. Community psychology.

### DISCUSSION

Experiencing a pandemic can be psychologically stressful. In these circumstances, feeling anxious, fearful, mental issue and other psychological issues about the virus is normal. However, the psychological resources used in the management of societal pandemics are discussed below.

**Psychotherapy:** The need for psychotherapy training in Nigeria is important in managing societal pandemics. It will help psychologists and nurses be able to reach out to more people in distress through

therapy sessions in overcoming their fears and anxieties. Individuals discussing their fears and emotional state with psychologist can help in finding ways to deal with societal pandemics.

**Psychomedia socialization:** Taking the relevance of psychologists in Nigeria to all media is a good way to manage societal pandemic. It will help the public to be aware of the duties and roles that psychologists play in our society and in their individual lives. Psychologists should be media friendly.

**Emotional intelligence:** Educating individuals on emotional intelligence will help them to be able to function independently during pandemics. It entails educating them on how to establish daily time periods (about 30 minutes) to be spent not worrying about the COVID 19 pandemic. Talking about or writing down their fears and emotions during periods of pandemics is a way to externalize anxious mood which is a coping mechanism in managing a pandemic. Individuals should know that when anxious thoughts recur, they are not to suppress them, rather, allow them to flow, but keep reminding themselves that they will deal with them during tomorrow's time period.

**Community psychology:** Availability of psychological technics and psychological clinics within at the community (local/grass-root) levels will help a lot in the management of societal pandemics. The psychosocial technics involve supports which could be rendered to individuals in needs in the society.

#### Practical Implications of the Findings

1. This research will be very useful to the government in knowing the behavioural remedies to pandemics.
2. The research is important to the world at large by keeping individuals informed about what and how a pandemic can be managed psychologically.
3. The research will be key to researchers in this line of research who may likely build on the information provided.

#### Limitation of the Study.

1. The inability to access the actual patients of COVID-19 is a limitation.
2. Not conducting the research empirically is also a limitation.

#### Conclusion

According to Barrett and Brown (2008), pandemic could spread faster and farther, and as a result, cause numerous psychological and social problems. This is a crucial issue that requires significant psychological management. Facing a

pandemic is an extremely frightening situation. The absence of information or contradictory information leaves people confused on what to believe. Stable psychological state are very crucial during this period.

#### Recommendations

1. Psychologists should actively explore and utilize psychological resources in managing societal pandemics.
2. Multidimensional psychosocial opportunities should be harnessed in managing societal pandemics.
3. Infodemic (killing/hoarding information) necessary for successful managing of pandemics should be abhorred.

#### Suggestions for Further Study

1. Further researches should use the actual patients of societal pandemics.
2. There is the need for future researches to be empirical based.

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