Anyadike Chizoba Favour

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CORONAVIRUS: THE MENACE AMONGST US

All around the world everyone is faced with a common enemy, coronavirus. We hear about it everyday on the news, we read about it in blogs and listen to information on the radio. Amidst this there are some that are still unaware of what is going on around them, the illiterates, the degenerates and the likes. This paper seeks to examine the coronavirus pandemic and the effects of the lockdown and restriction of movement on Nigerians.

Before I can go further, I will have to shed some light on what coronavirus is. Coronaviruses are a type of virus. It belongs to a large family of viruses that are known to cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). The Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) was identified as the cause of a disease outbreak that began in China in 2019. The disease is called Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID\_19). In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic. Public health groups, including the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), WHO and our very own Nigeria Center for Disease Control, are monitoring the pandemic and posting updates on their websites. These groups have also issued recommendations for preventing and treating the illness.

COVID-19 appeared in Wuhan, a city in China, in December 2019. Although health officials are still tracing the exact source of this new coronavirus, early hypotheses thought it may be linked to a seafood market in Wuhan, China. Some people who visited the market developed viral pneumonia caused by the new coronavirus. Coronavirus circulates in animals and some can be transmitted between animals and humans. This fact stands as the basis of the hypothesis that the virus emerged at the Wuhan live animal market from an interaction between an animal and a human. Scientists say it is highly likely that the virus came from bats but first passed through an intermediary animal in the same way that another coronavirus, Sars outbreak in 2002, infected humans. One animal implicated as an intermediary host between bats and humans is the pangolin which is the most illegally traded mammal in the world. However, a study that came out on Jan. 25, 2020, notes that the individual with the first reported case became ill on Dec. 1, 2019, and had no link to the seafood market. Investigations are ongoing as to how this virus originated and spread.

COVID-19 spreads from person to person in close proximity, similar to other respiratory illnesses, such as the flu. Droplets of bodily fluids such as saliva or mucus from an infected person are dispersed in the air or on surfaces by coughing or sneezing. These droplets can come into direct contact with other people or can infect those who pick them up by touching infected surfaces and then their face. According to scientists, coughs and sneezes can travel several feet and stay suspended in the air for up to 10 minutes. It is not yet known how long the virus can survive outside a host but, in other viruses, it ranges from a few hours to months. Transmission is of particular concern on transport, where droplets containing the coronavirus could pass between passengers or via surfaces like aeroplane seats and armrests. The incubation period of the coronavirus, the length of time before symptoms appear, is between one and 14 days.

COVID-19 symptoms include: cough, fever, shortness of breath, muscle aches, sore throat, unexplained loss of taste or smell, diarrhea and headache. In rare cases, COVID-19 can lead to severe respiratory problems, kidney failure or death. As of Apr. 15, 2020, 127,601 deaths have been attributed to COVID-19. However, 500,819 people have recovered from the illness.

The WHO declared the virus a pandemic on March 11 and said it was "deeply concerned by the alarming levels of spread and severity" of the outbreak. The WHO recommends basic hygiene such as regularly washing hands with soap and water, and covering your mouth with your elbow when sneezing or coughing. Avoid unnecessary, unprotected contact with animals and be sure to thoroughly wash hands after contact.

However, the most effective preventive measure is to maintain social distancing. Individuals are asked to keep at least 1.8 meters (six feet) between themselves and others especially if the other person is coughing and sneezing. Humans being as stubborn as they are refused to obey this. In a bid to curtail the spread of coronavirus, the government had to impose a compulsory lockdown on major cities in Nigeria. The government had to put some authorities in place to punish the breakers of this law. Even though this law was put in place for the benefit of the whole society it has had some adverse effects on the citizens and the nation as a whole.

There has been civil unrest since our President announced the news of the lockdown. Citizens are in disarray as they wonder how they’ll earn their source of income. This is why Ashley Okoli, a designer, model and stylist said “***The lockdown has affected in so many ways, mostly mentally because as much as I like to create and make money. I’m a multi-faceted creative and have different avenues for expressing myself, so to have all those channels inadvertently blocked, wow I’m struggling. Usually I sketch my designs and have tailors make them, but with lockdowns that is not possible so for the past month. It’s really affecting my income, as I’m usually chasing down leads to find pay but now there’s no leads as we’re all indoors”***

Due to the high rate of poverty in Nigeria, most people are not able to afford to stock up for these two weeks. Where would they get the money? They are worried about the strives they’ll face while they are locked up in their homes with no source of income. This is a problem most Nigerians are faced with. They are more concerned with how to get their daily bread. This is what Ms Oginsola said in an article published by the BBC “it is hunger I am worried about not a virus”.

There has also been an increase in the crime rate. With no money coming in and no food to survive, citizens turn to crime. Hoodlums have used the lockdown as an excuse to perpetrate criminal activities such as rape, looting and inflicting physical injuries. The other day, 200 armed gangsters invaded and robbed communities in Lagos and Ogun state. The affected areas include Abule-Egba, Baruwa, Agbado and so many others. The residents of these areas have decided to take the law into their own hands, transforming themselves into vigilantes to protect one another.

Similarly, the lockdown has also affected the mental health of citizens. Locked in their homes with nothing to do they start overthinking. They find themselves falling into depression and having pessimistic thoughts. It has been proven that people find themselves more prone to negative thoughts if various stressors that interfere with their life such as their environment, job and even fellow humans are in disarray.

Coronavirus is a major global threat and everyone is a suspected carrier. The lockdown is necessary as social distancing is very important to prevent the virus until a cure is found and to stop the ever increasing number of infected persons.