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## The Change in Attitude of Nigerians towards COVID-19

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### ABSTRACT

Since the discovery of COVID-19 in March 2020 in Nigeria different behavioural change has been observed amidst the citizens of the country towards the pandemic. At first, people were afraid of the pandemic and this was confirmed through their response to the measures given by the National Centre for Disease Control which include social distance, use of nose masks and sanitizers, curfew, and lockdown of crowded places. These measures have been effective in curbing the transmission of the disease in the country. In Nigeria, as at June 26<sup>th</sup> have 23,298 cases, 8,253 discharged cases and 554 deaths caused by COVID-19. Of recent, change in the attitude of people towards the pandemic has been observed as they no longer fear the impacts of the pandemic. People now go out without using their facemasks, churches are opening and some are even spreading false information about the pandemics. Pitifully, the number of cases in Nigeria has increased drastically in the past 3 weeks.

**Keywords:** COVID-19; Behaviour Change; Nigeria Attitude

### 1 Introduction

COVID-19 was first discovered in China, Hubei province in the city of Wuhan in December 2019. It was initially linked to the animal and seafood market and later animal to human (suspected bat as the intermediate host) and is widespread from person to person globally. We now have 10,005,710 COVID-19 cases worldwide, active cases of patients currently infected with COVID-19 worldwide is 4,091,817 while 4,034,117 (99%) are in mild condition and 57,700 (1%) are in serious or critical condition, globally we also have 498,996 deaths cases of COVID-19 and 5,414,897 patients that recovered from COVID-19, while 215 countries and territories are affected globally and 55 countries in Africa are affected [1].

COVID-19 was first confirmed in Nigeria on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February 2020 by The Federal Ministry of Health in Lagos State, Nigeria. The case was an Italian citizen who works in Nigeria and returned from Milan, Italy on 25<sup>th</sup> February 2020. The number of cases has since increased from tens to hundreds to thousands and currently, Nigeria has confirmed 23,298 cases of the virus as at 26<sup>th</sup> of June, 2020. Since the discovery of COVID-19 in March 2020 in Nigeria different behavioural change has been observed amidst the citizens

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of the country towards the pandemic. At first, people were afraid of the pandemic and this was confirmed through their response to the measures given by the National Centre for Disease Control which include social distance, use of nose masks and sanitizers, curfew, and lockdown of crowded places.

However, it's been observed that with the increase in number of COVID-19 cases, Nigerians have shown a less concerned attitude towards the existence of the virus than it was when the virus was first discovered in the country. Gradually, there is decrease in the observance of precautionary measures including social distancing and hand hygiene [3]. The federal government of Nigeria commenced a 14 days total lockdown in three states Lagos, Oyo and Abuja where the COVID-19 fight was really tense in March and some other states joined in the total lockdown subsequently.

As at today, the total lockdown has been relaxed. The lockdown was sudden hits on Nigerians and this was as a means to ensure that different strategies to handle the virus have been put in place including but not limited to aggressive testing facilities, provision of isolation centres as well as personal protective equipment. The lockdown was extended for another three weeks as the spread was massive and more efforts had to be made to safeguard the citizens and it was gradually eased on 1<sup>st</sup> of June 2020 [4]. This was due to issues such as economic crash, hunger and poverty that affected the country and made coping with the lockdown difficult for Nigerians who mostly have to make ends meet through daily hustle [5]. The lockdown does not apply to those providing essential services, such as food distributors and retailers, including market stalls selling food and groceries, which the government has said can operate for four hours in every 48 hours [2].

The lockdown, however, halts many Nigerians working in informal sectors from traveling to work or conducting their business. Local food vendors and traders have expressed fears over their ability to feed their families during the lockdown, with their daily earnings their only source of sustenance. An increase in food prices as a result of the lockdown also means that many cannot stock up on necessities. The hike in the prices of goods like nose masks and sanitizers have also discouraged its use. Alternatives like cloth masks have given people a fake sense of protection so they no longer observe social distancing.

Unlocking the economy and allowing for religious gatherings have also made the believe systems towards accepting the existence of the virus while still living normal lives with the believe that God is the cure and also lack of access to information by people in the rural areas that may not be able to access the media or keep abreast with recent trends in the world.

Reasons for Nigerians lackadaisical attitude span from laws made for the nation which are not upheld by top government officials, disbelief in the existence of the virus as the government slashed the health and education budget but renovated the national assembly complex amidst the pandemic, rebuttal of results by some states and insufficient testing in some others [6]. In the war against COVID-19, health system resilience, accountability and integrity are more important than ever. The health systems of some high-income-countries have become overwhelmed by the rising number of infected persons and deaths from the disease. Weaker, corruption-prone and less resilient health systems of many low and middle income countries are even more vulnerable. Some may even collapse [7].

Research has underscored the vulnerability of Nigeria's health system. A consistently solid and accountable health system has eluded the country. The requisite health resources are also in short supply. The reality is that citizens, health workers and international development partners worry that Nigeria's health system is very weak and may be unable to adequately combat COVID-19. It is important to note that the virus isn't moving but rather people move the virus. As such, information and the use of stronger policies and law enforcement agencies will aid in instilling discipline amongst individuals especially if they have to leave their home.

## 2 Factors Responsible for the Change in Attitude of Nigerians towards COVID-19

Several factors are responsible for the change in attitude. Firstly, the decision of the government to release lockdown and curfew in some states when the disease is spreading increased the rate at which people move around. This is risky because it has been confirmed that the diseases are now in the air and infected people don't even know how they contracted it. As a result, this might lead to an increase in the number of cases in the coming week [8].

Secondly, the reduction in the activity of the media in sensitizing the people on the effect of the diseases. The power of the media cannot be underestimated during this period. They are responsible for passing across the number of daily cases recorded and what people can put in place to reduce the transmission of the disease. However, the attention of the media has shifted away from the pandemic by focusing on other issues such as politics, rape, and racism.

In the same vein, the high rate of the dependence of Nigerians on the daily job to survive is another factor. People cannot stay at home with anything to eat. For instance, in a family of six where the father is a cobbler and the mother is a trader, they must go out daily to look for food for their children. Although, the government and several Civic Society organizations came up with palliative plans for the less privileged they are not sustainable because the effect of the pandemic is a long term one. Some people even say dying from hunger is worse than COVID-19, so they go out and look for food.

Because of the disloyalty and lack of transparency from Nigeria Government, there is change in the attitude and perspective of different Nigerians towards believe the existence of COVID-19 and this has highly confused a lot of people that had previously believed its existence and with the change in attitude has made many individuals at risk of contracting COVID-19. The major factor that trigger this is the drastic increase in the number of COVID-19 confirmed cases in Nigeria around March and during that time as the COVID-19 cases increase, the fear of COVID-19 decrease and this caused the sudden change in attitude towards Covid-19 and the resistance to take the necessary precautions to prevent COVID-19 such as washing of hands, using face mask and so on.

## 3 Suggested Solution

Different people suggested that Nigerian Government should give updates through videos of people in isolation centres because they want to see the victims of COVID-19 and unless such is done, they have believed that COVID-19 is not in Nigeria. Fighting against COVID-19 requires collective efforts from the government, healthcare workers, and the people. If the government and healthcare workers are putting in a lot of effort into curbing the pandemic and the people are not supportive, it might take a longer time for it to be curbed.

The suggested solution to make the people have positive attitude towards COVID-19 can come directly from Nigeria Government by giving updates through anonymous videos from the COVID-19 in isolation centre and also increase the advocacy of COVID-19 and coming up with better ways to improve the standard of living of people because the issues of unemployment and poverty has made different Nigerians bring different opinions about COVID-19 [9-10].

## 4 Conclusion

The role of cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces, avoiding handshakes and close contact with people, having high index of suspicion, avoiding close contact with subjects suffering from acute respiratory infections, avoiding unprotected contact with farm or wild animals, strengthening healthcare systems, regular washing of hands with water and soap thoroughly for at least 30 seconds and use of sanitizer cannot be undermined

in the protection of individuals from contracting the virus. People should also realize that some carriers of the virus are asymptomatic and those with symptoms should self isolate and seek medical help immediately.

## 5 Declarations

### 5.1 Acknowledgments

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### 5.2 Authors Contribution

The author equally contributed to the work which is reported in the present manuscript. Before publication of this manuscript all the authors sincerely agreed with the terms and conditions of *AJIR Preprints*.

### 5.3 Competing Interests

The author declares no competing interests exist in the publication.

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