

COVID-19 AND SOCIAL DISTANCING: CHALLENGES FACED BY PERSONS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT IN SOUTH-WEST, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Persons with visual impairment are confronted with difficulties in maintaining and keeping social distancing guidelines in the fight against the spread of COVID-19 outbreak due to their peculiarities. This study examines COVID-19 and social distancing: the challenges of persons with visual impairment in the south-west, Nigeria. The objective of the study was to identify the contribution of Covid-19 pandemic to the challenges faced by persons with visual impairment in Nigeria and to examine how a social distancing measure has increased the challenges faced by persons with visual impairment in Nigeria. 150 respondents were purposively selected from 6 states of the south-west of Nigeria. The findings reveal that COVID-19 pandemic contributes more to the challenges faced by persons with visual impairment in Nigeria and social distancing measure increases the challenges faced by persons with visual impairment in Nigeria. The study therefore recommends that persons with visual impairment should follow the Center for Disease Control guidelines in preventing COVID-19.

Key words: COVID-19, Social Distancing, Visual Impairment, South-West, Nigeria

Introduction

COVID-19 also known as coronavirus, the pandemic today is not only a health issue. Its impacts cut across all levels of society causing important consequences for social, economic, education, political and human security (Abodunrin, Oloye & Adesola, 2020). Over the years, each country of the world is confronted with diverse pandemics but the most recent of all that affect the entire global community is COVID-19 (Abodunrin, Oloye & Adesola, 2020). This coronavirus has brought the entire continent of the world into a state of dilemma thereby making the world power of economic countries to be incapacitated in curbing this virus. Since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic few months ago, governments all over the world have been confronted with the challenge of finding a lasting solution to this devastating virus. As of March 31, 2020, more than 37,800 people worldwide have died of COVID-19, the highly infectious respiratory disease caused by the coronavirus. More than 787,000 people have been tested positive and over 178 countries/regions have been affected, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University.

Since the discovery of coronavirus in China, more cases were registered outside mainland China than inside, marking a new milestone in the spread of global pandemic. The virus has spread from China to the rest of the world, prompting the World Health Organisation to label the COVID-19 a pandemic. Human-to-human transmission became evident after cases were recorded with no apparent link to China. The number of infected people continues to increase day by day and more deaths are being recorded globally every minute

The pandemic which has thrown all continents of the world into a crisis and has brought a paradigm shift which has negative influence on the policies and programmes of all government at the different levels. The developed and the developing nations are struggling to get rid of this infection with the third world countries included. The coronavirus has posed a serious threat to economic, political, social and health globally irrespective of gender, race, ethnic, religion, status and condition.

COVID-19 has a great impact on the socio-economic status and this includes:

- Loss of skilled and experienced workers;
- Reduced supply of labour;
- Loss of key staff and activist which may lead to poor organizing and defect in support of membership;
- It causes poverty through the loss of life of bread winner;
- It reduced productivity and negative impact on economic growth.

The visually impaired are the group of people characterized by inefficiency in the organ of sight which hinders individual capability in performing various functions that requires the use of sight. The ability of this group of people to utilize sighted guide for their mobility is completely affected due to social distancing. Social distancing is one of the methods recommended by World Health Organisation (WHO) and other stakeholders to curb the further spread of the disease.

Visual impairment is a condition of reduced visual performance that cannot be remedied by refractive correction (spectacles or contact lenses), surgery or medical methods (DeCarlo, Woo and Woo, 2006). Consequently, it results in functional limitations of the visual system that may be characterised by irreversible vision loss, restricted visual field and decreased contrast sensitivity, increased sensitivity to glare as well as decreased ability to perform activities of daily living, such as reading or writing (Kavitha, Manumali, Praveen & Heralgi, 2015). Corn and Lusk (2010) affirm that individuals with Visually Impairment have measurable vision, yet experience difficulties accomplishing visual tasks even with the use of refractive correction. Furthermore, these individuals are sometimes capable of enhancing their abilities to accomplish visual tasks with the use of compensatory low vision aids and/or environmental adjustments.

As an individual with unique challenges, the visually impaired depend mostly on sighted guide and the use of white cane at times for them to be able to move safely from one point to another most especially in a busy, crowded, unfamiliar environment and when crossing roads. This characteristics makes it difficult for them to navigate the environment especially for those who are totally blind.

Social distancing creates different challenges for the visually impaired, depending on the level of their sight loss. The totally blind are completely reliant on their caning and auditory skills to maneuver in the current environment. Those with low vision can rely on their visual cues to sense shapes and assist them. Many now result to longer than usual canes and walk somewhat slower than usual to anticipate what is in front of them (Cohen, 2020).

According to Royal National Institute for the Blind, (2020), Social distancing measures have been particularly felt by people trying to access food. Meanwhile, inaccessible signage and the social pressure to keep to the rules are causing additional stress and worry. RNIB is concerned that, some of the challenges people with visual impairment faced in accessing supermarket may be replicated more widely as services begin to open up again after lockdown. The Director of Services of RNIB, David Clarke reported that, the unique challenges of social distancing for the visually impaired have it hard, with two third reporting feeling less independent since lockdown. As lockdown eases, but social distancing continues to be enforced, the visual nature of restrictions risks a disproportionate impact on people with visual impairment, restricting their ability to access services and transport.

The additional challenges faced by the visually impaired during the COVID-19 pandemic are enormous. Individuals who are visually impaired are potentially exposed to increased risk of contracting the virus due to lifestyle requirements from being visually impaired. This includes:

- Difficulties with barriers to implementing good hygiene measures such as inability to locate or see the hand sanitizer stations that are prevalent in stores upon entry.
- Need to be guided by holding someone's elbow (elbows now used for sneezing and coughing)

- Need to frequently touch things for orientation and to identify things.
- Co-morbidity with diabetes and other conditions.
- Need to use public transportation (crowded, difficult to socially distance, and or rride sharing such as) (United State Association of Blind Athlete, 2020).

Objective of the study

The objective of the study was to:

1. Identify the contribution of Covid-19 pandemic to the challenges faced by person s with visual impairment in Nigeria
2. Examine how a social distancing measure has increases the challenges faced by person s with visual impairment in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide the study:

1. Does Covid-19 pandemic contribute more to the challenges faced by person s with visual impairment in Nigeria?
2. How does social distancing measures increases the challenges faced by person s with visual impairment in Nigeria?

Hypothesis

Ho1 There is no significant relationship between COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges faced by persons with visual impairment

Ho2 There is no significant relationship between social distancing and the challenges faced by persons with visual impairment

Methodology

The study adopts survey research design. The data were collected using self made questionnaire, this is to enable the researcher find out the challenges face by people with visual impairment as a result of COVID-19 pandemic and social distancing measures. Population for the study comprises of all persons with visual impairment in south-west, Nigeria. Purposive sampling technique was used to select one hundred and fifty (150) respondents from the target population including the totally blind and low vision. The data was analysed using chi-square.

Results

Research question one: Does COVID-19 pandemic contribute more to the challenges faced by persons with visual impairment in Nigeria?

S/N	Statements	SD	D	U	A	SA	\bar{x}	S.D
1	I did not have the opportunity of attending religious and social functions	17 11.3%	11 7.3%	20 13.3%	32 21.3%	70 46.7%	3.85	1.38
2	I am satisfied visiting my friends, colleagues and relatives	59 39.3%	51 34.0%	13 8.7%	12 8.0%	15 10.0%	2.15	1.29
3	In most ways I was totally lockdown	14 9.3%	14 9.3%	7 4.7%	36 24.0%	79 52.7%	4.01	1.34
4	COVID-19 pandemic has reduces my income	20 13.3%	28 18.7%	2 1.3%	51 34.0%	49 32.7%	3.54	1.44
5	I spend more during this lockdown	20 13.3%	30 20.0%	15 10.0%	45 30.0%	40 26.7%	3.37	1.41
Weighted Mean = 3.38								

Table 1 shows the perception of the respondents on Covid-19 pandemic contribution to the challenges faced by persons with visual impairment in Nigeria. 76.7% respondents indicated they were totally lockdown during the pandemic, 18.6% disagreed. 68.0% respondents do not have the opportunity of attending religious and social functions, 66.7% respondents’ income was reduced due to the pandemic, and they spend more during the lockdown.

Therefore, COVID-19 pandemic contribute more to the challenges faced by persons with visual impairment in Nigeria

Research question two: How does social distancing measure increases the challenges faced by persons with visual impairment in Nigeria?

s/n	Statements	SD	D	U	A	SA	\bar{x}	S.D
1	Social distancing have a devastating effect on the visually impaired	12 8.0%	13 8.7%	15 10.0%	30 20.0%	80 53.3%	4.02	1.31
2	Inaccessible signage and the social pressure to keep to the rules are causing additional stress and worry	8 5.3%	12 8.0%	7 4.7%	50 33.3%	73 48.7%	4.12	1.15
3	I am satisfied travelling outside my current state of residence	60 40.0%	60 40.0%	4 2.7%	14 9.3%	12 8.0%	2.05	1.23
4	Social distancing is near impossible for many people with visual impairment	22 14.7%	8 5.3%	4 2.7%	66 44.0%	50 33.3%	3.76	1.36
5	Keeping two meters away from other people is really challenging	10 6.7%	15 10.0%	5 3.3%	62 41.3%	58 38.7%	3.95	1.19
Weighted Mean = 3.58								

Table 2 shows how social distancing measure increases the challenges faced by persons with visual impairment in Nigeria.82.0% of the respondents were not able to access signage during the pandemic, 73.3% respondents were adversely devastated by the pandemic, and 80.0% respondents were not able to move about due to social distancing.

Hence, Social distancing measure increases the challenges faced by persons with visual impairment in Nigeria. Most of them were unable to access signage, movement was restricted for those with visual

impairment because of social distancing, travelling outside those with visually impairment was not possible, and these reasons increased the challenges faced by persons with visual impairment in Nigeria.

Hypothesis one: There is no significant relationship between COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges faced by persons with visual impairment

Table 3: Chi-Square analysis showing the relationship of COVID-19 pandemic to the challenges faced by persons with visual impairment

Questions	COVID-19 contribution to the challenges faced by persons with visual impairment					Total	X ² Crit	X ² Cal.	DF	P-value
	SD	D	U	A	SA					
Q1	17 11.3%	11 7.3%	20 13.3%	32 21.3%	70 46.7%	150 100.0%	26.30	184.438	16	.000
Q2	59 39.3%	51 34.0%	13 8.7%	12 8.0%	15 10.0%	150 100.0%				
Q3	14 9.3%	14 9.3%	7 4.7%	36 24.0%	79 52.7%	150 100.0%				
Q4	20 13.3%	28 18.7%	2 1.3%	51 34.0%	49 32.7%	150 100.0%				
Q5	20 13.3%	30 20.0%	15 10.0%	45 30.0%	40 26.7%	150 100.0%				
Total	130 17.3%	134 17.9%	57 7.6%	176 23.5%	253 33.7%	750 100.0%				

The table 3 above showed that there is a significant relationship between COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges faced by persons with visual impairment (X²-Crit=26.30, X²-Cal = 184.438, p<.05). The X²-Crit is less than the X²-Cal. Hence, COVID-19 pandemic contributed immensely to the challenges faced by persons with visual impairment in the study.

The hypothesis is therefore rejected.

Hypothesis two: There is no significant relationship between social distancing and the challenges faced by persons with visual impairment

Table 4: Chi-Square analysis showing the relationship of social distancing to the challenges faced by persons with visual impairment

Questions	Social distancing and challenges faced by persons with visual impairment					Total	X ² Crit	X ² Cal.	DF	P-value
	SD	D	U	A	SA					
Q1	12 8.0%	13 8.7%	15 10.0%	30 20.0%	80 53.3%	150 100.0%	26.30	278.423	16	.000
Q2	8 5.3%	12 8.0%	7 4.7%	50 33.3%	73 48.7%	150 100.0%				
Q3	60 40.0%	60 40.0%	4 2.7%	14 9.3%	12 8.0%	150 100.0%				
Q4	22 14.7%	8 5.3%	4 2.7%	66 44.0%	50 33.3%	150 100.0%				
Q5	10 6.7%	15 10.0%	5 3.3%	62 41.3%	58 38.7%	150 100.0%				
Total	112 14.9%	108 14.4%	35 4.7%	222 29.6%	273 36.4%	750 100.0%				

The table 4 above showed that there is a significant relationship between social distancing and the challenges faced by persons with visual impairment ($X^2\text{-Crit}=26.30$, $X^2\text{-Cal} = 278.423$, $p<.05$). The $X^2\text{-Crit}$ is less than the $X^2\text{-Cal}$. Hence, social distancing contributed immensely to the challenges faced by persons with visual impairment in the study.

The hypothesis is therefore rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The findings shows that, Covid-19 pandemic contribute more to the challenges faced by persons with visual impairment in Nigeria. This was supported with the view of Abodunrin, Oloye & Adesola (2020) who reported that, over the years, each countries of the world are confronted with diverse pandemic but the most recent of all that affect the entire global community is COVID-19. Since the discovery of coronavirus in China, more cases were registered outside mainland China than inside, marking a new milestone in the spread of global pandemic. The virus has spread from China to the rest of the world, prompting the World Health Organisation to label the COVID-19 a pandemic. Human to human transmission became evident after cases were recorded with no apparent link to China. The number of infected people continue to increase day by day and more deaths are been recorded globally every minute

It was also revealed from the study that, Social distancing measure increases the challenges faced by persons with visual impairment in Nigeria. Most of them were unable to access signage, movement was restricted for those with visual impairment because of social distancing, travelling outside those with visually impairment was not possible, and these reasons increased the challenges faced by persons with visual impairment in Nigeria. This was supported with the view of Cohen (2020) who was of the view that, Social distancing creates different challenges for the visually impaired, depending on the level of their sight loss. The totally blind are completely reliant on their caning and auditory skills to maneuver in the current environment. Those with low vision can rely on their visual cues to sense shapes and assist them. Many now result to longer than usual canes and walk somewhat slower than usual to anticipate what is in front of them. According to Royal National Institute for the Blind, (2020), Social distancing measures have been particularly felt by people trying to access food. Meanwhile, inaccessible signage and the social pressure to keep to the rules are causing additional stress and worry.

Conclusion

COVID-19 pandemic is a global health challenge that posed significant threat all sectors including human and this challenges is applicable to all individual around the world including Nigeria. In no doubt, COVID-19 contribute more to the challenges faced by persons with visual impairment as well as the social distancing measures which is one of the best ways of reducing the further spread of the disease.

Recommendations

The study therefore recommends that:

- Persons with visual impairment should follow the Center for Disease Control guidelines in preventing COVID-19 such as washing of hands regularly with soap and water, avoiding touching of eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands, covering of mouth and nose with tissue when coughing or sneezing, practice of social distancing by avoiding large gathering and maintaining distance from others and so on.
- There should be a limit in crowded areas such as public transportation, market place worship centre's.
- Persons with visual impairment should be encouraged to stay home, especially if totally blind because of their reliance on sighted guide whenever they are going to unknown places or having difficulties in establishing their contact with the environment.

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