

Covid-19 and its implications on the mental health of selected Nigerian employees during the 2020 national lockdown

Abiodun Adekunle Ogunola

Olabisi Onabanjo University, Nigeria

Email: ogunola.abiodun@oouagoiwoye.edu.ng

Moyosore Omodenuola Olupona

Olabisi Onabanjo University, Nigeria

Email: moyoolupona@gmail.com

Corresponding author: Abiodun Adekunle Ogunola

Abstract

The mental health of Nigerian employees in an organization is as important as their physical health as it allows them to focus on their jobs and aims at effective productivity in their organizations without any restrictions or restraints. A qualitative study approach was utilized through the use of structured interviews to explore the implications of Covid-19 on the mental health of those who worked from home and those who worked physically at their workplace. The study made use of 50 selected workers who worked at home and physically at work during the 2020 national lockdown in Nigeria. The study engaged the use of thematic analysis which led to the discussion of themes such as changes in work schedules, effects on mental capacity, exposure, adaptation, changes, and attitudes towards the lockdown. The study identified that there was a change in the mental health of Nigerian employees because they went through experiences that brought diverse perspectives to the way they view themselves and their work. It is recommended that people are equipped with psychological coping mechanisms to deal with unexpected situations and appreciate the significance of relationships with family, friends, colleagues at work, and speak up if they face any mental challenges.

Keywords: mental health, covid-19, challenges, employees, lockdown, productivity

Introduction

Coronaviruses are a group related Ribonucleic acid (RNA) viruses that cause diseases in mammals and birds. In humans and birds, they cause Respiratory tract infections that can range from mild to lethal. Mild illnesses in humans include some cases of the common cold (which is also caused by other viruses, predominantly rhinoviruses), while Lethal varieties can cause Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) and COVID-19. In cows and pigs, they cause diarrhoea, while in mice they cause Hepatitis and encephalomyelitis (Cherry et al, 2017; Wise et al, 2020).

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness. (Webster 2020).

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and

act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood to adult. Mental health is a common Phenomenon to all individuals across or globes and ages even gender and it has great influences on our daily life like wise Covid-19 a virus that shook the whole world and kept it on stand still how did this Virus affect our Mental health what damage did it cause, what Changes did it bring. (Brunier & Drysdale, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted or halted critical mental health services in 93% of countries worldwide while the demand for mental health is increasing, according to a new WHO survey. The survey of 130 countries provides the first global data showing the devastating impact of COVID-19 on access to mental health services and underscores the urgent need for increased funding. The survey was published ahead of WHO's *Big Event for Mental Health* – a global online advocacy event on 10 October that will bring together world leaders, celebrities, and advocates to call for increased mental health investments in the wake of COVID-19. (Brunier & Drysdale, (2020). WHO has previously highlighted the chronic underfunding of mental health: prior to the pandemic, countries were spending less than 2 per cent of their national health budgets on mental health, and struggling to meet their population's needs (WHO Survey 2020).

The pandemic increased the demand for mental health services. Bereavement, isolation, loss of income and fear are triggering mental health conditions or exacerbating existing ones. Many people may be facing increased levels of alcohol and drug use, insomnia, and anxiety. Meanwhile, COVID-19 itself can lead to neurological and mental complications, such as delirium, agitation, and stroke. People with pre-existing mental, neurological or substance use disorders are also more vulnerable to SARS-CoV-2 infection – they may stand a higher risk of severe outcomes and even death. “Good mental health is absolutely fundamental to overall health and well-being,” said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization. “COVID-19 has interrupted essential mental health services around the world just when they are needed most”.

As an example of the narration of the challenges that individuals faced during the pandemic, Joseph (2022) narrated the experiences of Hong Kong residents in this context, that physical distancing policies required the residents to stay in their rooms and keep the doors closed. Care from healthcare professionals wearing personal protective equipment potentially decreased the ‘human touch’ in the healthcare and that those healthcare professionals limited their face-to-face time with the respondents due to the physical distancing policy that worsened the residents’ loneliness. The scenario here also played out in many quarters during the national lockdown in Nigeria, with many individuals unable to go out of their homes to go to their places of work and business, as well as the inability to converge at social gatherings and places of worship.

Also, Cheung, Wu, & Chui (2022) pointed out that illness and death caused by the virus might not be the only factors involved in causing anxiety, depression, and stress, for instance, changes in lifestyle and the economic situation arising from the pandemic (e.g., lockdown and social distancing measures, high unemployment rates due to closure of enterprises). It was reported by the authors that people felt unhappy, and displayed symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress, and also that the mental health of people change with different phases of the pandemic.

Harper, Satchell, Fido, & Latzman (2021) in their findings, situated within a larger literature pertaining to the oftentimes adaptive nature of the experience of negative emotions, raised serious concerns with efforts to identify “mental health issues” associated with strong emotional responses, which, for the majority of individuals, are both normative and protective. That is, for most individuals, the anxious responses may represent a normal and adaptive response to a real and present danger that one cannot fight or flee from, within the environment (i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic).

Unfortunately, The Covid-19 pandemic which arrived and affected not only countries but also every aspect of our lives and brought a Change to the systems. This arrival brought a huge change to Nigerian Employees and their working systems. The pandemic brought about new rule and regulations which called for a National Lockdown where by social distancing must be adhered to which brought about so Employees working from home and this brought a whole lot of stress to the Employees and also have effects on their mental on Juggling work with family, trying to adapt to the use of systems and programs and made great influences on the productivity

and effectiveness of the employees. Also, Employees could not return to their offices which made a great part of why employees to lost their Jobs unexpectedly and this put a lot of stress on the Employees who are the bread winner of their respective families, while some of the employees that wherein list for promotion either got declined or demoted dues to the strains that came from Covid-19 and Lockdown.

The 2020 National Lockdown in this study is described as the period between March 2020 and December 2020, in which there were national and state-based lockdowns which affected the movement, activities, and work of individuals in various spheres of education, work, organization, commerce, economy, travels, and indeed all facets of human engagements during the period under consideration.

Methods

Research Design

A structured interview was employed in this study. The research purposefully targeted those who went to work and those would could not go to their workplaces during the 2020 national lockdown. This allows for robust data to be gathered on the experiences of workers at the time under review.

For this Research, the design that was considered was Qualitative research design. Data collection which is defined as the procedure of collecting, measuring and analysing accurate insights for research using standard validated techniques. In this Research the procedure that was applied was one on one interview and phone interview with the use of structured questions. The responses were encoded based on reasons such as related theories, previous studies, emphasis by the respondents, repeated answers as well as the researcher's view.

Participants

A total number of 50 Nigerian employees participated in the study through the use of purposive sampling. Following the selection of the organizations and the participants, the researchers created various opportunities to meet with the participants which allowed the researchers to discuss the research objectives further. The participants then gave their approval to be part of the study after which their responses were coded and recorded.

Data Collection

The participants were interviewed using a structured approach. Two structured interview guides were developed (one for those who work at their workplace and one for those who worked from home) (See Appendix 1 and 2). To ensure reliability and validity, these interviews were used for all interviews for the relevant participants. Opportunities were provided for participants to develop and expand on their responses. The introductory questions on the interview guide were open-ended in order to build rapport and interaction between the participants and the interviewer. The interviews lasted on average 30 minutes and were recorded on a smartphone.

Data Analysis

The interviews were analyzed using the process of thematic analysis to allow for a broader understanding of the data generated and to address the subject of the research effectively. The coding of transcripts led to the identification and grouping of numerous themes which are subsequently discussed to bring to the fore the various ideas and conceptualizations that aided in the analysis of the research.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Analysis of Respondents

| Variables | Category | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------|--------------|-----------|------------|
| Sample | Total Number | 50 | 100 |
| Gender | Male | 35 | 70 |
| | Female | 15 | 30 |

| | | | |
|--------------|---|----|----|
| Age | 21-30 | 8 | 16 |
| | 31-40 | 22 | 44 |
| | 41-50 | 14 | 28 |
| | 51-above | 6 | 12 |
| Occupation | Medical personnel | 32 | 64 |
| | Teacher | 10 | 20 |
| | Others | 8 | 16 |
| Organization | Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) | 20 | 40 |
| | Neuropsychiatric Hospital, Yaba, Lagos | 12 | 24 |
| | Federal Polytechnic Ilaro, Ogun State | 5 | 10 |
| | Lagos State Universal Basic Education Board | 5 | 10 |
| | EY Company | 1 | 2 |
| | Cose Harris Motor Groups | 2 | 4 |
| | Zenith Bank | 1 | 2 |
| | OLAM International limited | 2 | 4 |
| | City loss Adjuster Insurance company | 2 | 4 |

Source: Authors' Computation from Survey

The participants' age ranged from 21 to 30 years (16%), 31 to 40 years (44%), 41 to 50 years (28%) to 51 and above (12%). In terms of their gender, 35 (70%) were males and 15 (30%) were females. In terms of their occupation, 32 (64%) were medical personnel, 10 (20%) were teachers and 8 (16%) were under other professions. Their organization, 20 (40%) were employees of Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), 12 (24%) worked at Neuropsychiatric Hospital, Yaba, 5 (10%) worked at Federal Polytechnic, Ilaro, 5 (10%) worked at LASUBEB School, 1 (2%) was an employee of EY Company, 2 (4%) were employees of Cose Harris Motor Groups, 1 (2%) worked at Zenith Bank, 2 (4%) worked at OLAM International limited and 2 (4%) were employees of City loss Adjuster Insurance company.

Hypothesis Testing

The following hypotheses were postulated for consideration in this study.

1. There is significant change in the work pattern of Nigerian Employees due to Covid-19
2. There is significant impact of Covid-19 on Nigerian Employees' mental health during the lockdown
3. There is significant impact of Covid-19 on Nigerian Employees' mental health after the lockdown

Hypothesis One: There is significant change in the work pattern of Nigerian Employees due to Covid-19.

The covid-19 pandemic led to a nationwide lockdown and also restriction of movement and interactions between people which is the heartbeat of any working pattern. This study aims to determine if there is a significant change in the work pattern of Nigerian Employees due to Covid-19 pandemic with the analysis of the responses of the interviewees.

The responses from interview sections of participants that worked from home during the Covid-19 lockdown. The results of these interviews are categories that described their encoded responses. Exposure is one of the encoded categories and it describes the initial effect of the covid-19 lockdown on the work life and mental capacity of the interviewees. Two themes were identified here as follows:

- **Change in work schedule:** The interviewees describe the effect of the lockdown on their working schedules. They disclosed if there was an increase or reduction in their working period or whether there was no change at all.

- **Effect on Mental Capacity:** The interviewees went on to discuss how the change in schedule influenced their mental capacity in terms of creativity. The lockdown was something new and out of the blue. Therefore, individuals had to come up with new ways to adapt to the lockdown phenomenon.

Interviewees that had to remain at work also gave account of their experiences of the pandemic and its impact on their lives and mental health. The responses of the respondents are divided into categories and one of which is Increased Work-time. The interviewees in this section were not confined to their homes but had to continue going to work due to the essentiality of their occupation. Major organizations that kept their doors open during the pandemic were hospitals and clinics. This means that the interviewees had firsthand experience of the covid-19 situation.

According to the results, the interviewees that worked from home described initial reactions and impacts of the lockdown that was imposed because of the covid-19 pandemic. These set of responses fall down under the exposure category. In relating to exposure, all the interviewees were workers that had to appear at work physically every working day. However, the lockdown brought about a change in schedule as many office goers had to work from home. All the interviewees in this section were affected by this. The lockdown brought about a need for a change in mental capacity in terms of creativity because of the change in environment and schedule. All the interviewees reported that the lockdown helped them to increase their level of creativity.

The results also indicated the effects of the lockdown on the lives and workplaces of the respondents. Majority of the participants like respondents 01 and 02 disclosed that the lockdown made them to see new possibilities about life and daily activities. Participants showed that the lockdown helped to improve their mental health by providing an opportunity to see things in a new light and educate their minds. In terms of physical changes as an effect of the lockdown, some participants such respondents 02 and 07 disclosed that there was no change in their place of work. However, others stated that there were changes in the place of work such as less target and some stated that their workplace imposed more time management as well as decrease in number of staff. The results also indicated that all the participants were of the opinion that things will never be the same again because of the covid-19 pandemic.

The other section of participants were interviewees who remained at their duty posts even after the lockdown was imposed. It was disclosed that most of these workers were medical personnel. The first category of responses for this section is the increase in work-time. All the participants in this section stated that they had spent more time at their place of work due to the pandemic.

This correlates with the findings of Nri-Ezedi, C. A., Nnamani, C. P., Ezech, N. I., Okechukwu, C., Fasesan, O., & Ulasi, T. O. (2020) who studied the psychological distress among residents in Nigeria during the covid-19 pandemic. Their findings indicated there was a significant change in the work life of the sample used and that high prevalence of psychological distress was detected among adults living in Nigeria and one of the triggers was occupation and working status. Also, Ogueji, Agberotimi, Adesanya, & Gidado (2021) found in their study that Covid-19 pandemic had distressing impacts on some unemployed and employed people in Nigeria. Their findings further indicated that the data from the unemployed participants revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic affected their mental health through distressing impacts that included anxiety over the COVID-19 pandemic or loss of jobs, financial challenges, depressive reports, stress, and suspicion of people.

Hypothesis Two: There is significant impact of Covid-19 on Nigerian Employees' mental health during the lockdown.

The pandemic was one that the world had never seen before. Families were separated, plans were altered and the daily lives of people were affected. These effects usually have an impact on the mental health of an individual. Therefore, this study postulates that there is significant impact of Covid-19 pandemic on Nigerian Employees' mental health during the lockdown. Another category from the responses of the interviewees that worked from home is Adaptation. After exposure to the lockdown phenomenon, life had to go on with brings about the adaptation category. This category is all about the adjusting to the new circumstances of life and accomplishing goals. This category therefore led to two themes as follows:

- **Goal Attainment:** An essential aspect of adaptation is that an organism is able to accomplish the tasks which it was able to do in previous circumstances. Not accomplishing these tasks/goals means that adaptation is not accomplished. Therefore, interviewees disclosed whether they were able to accomplish their goals during the lockdown phenomenon.
- **Attitude towards Lockdown:** Here, the interviewees discussed how they viewed the lockdown phenomenon and their attitude towards it. Attitude towards new phenomenon will also influence adaptation towards it. Attitudes towards phenomena that are crucial to life are influential to an individual mental health. For instance, attitude towards mental health will certainly influence the mental state. Therefore, attitude towards adaptation is crucial aspect of adaptation and influencer of mental health.

In the adaptation category, it was disclosed in the results that goal attainment in the presence of unforeseen and new circumstances as well as situations is a proof of adaptation and adjustment. About 50% of the interviewees in this section such as respondents 05, 06 and 07 claimed they were able to adjust and fulfill their plans and goals. However, some participants such as respondents 01 and 02 disclosed that they partially able to do this. Furthermore, in the adaptation category, attitude to lockdown is also discovered to be a determining factor of adaptation to the lockdown. It was discovered that respondents who had positive attitude towards the lockdown were able to adjust and attain their goals such as respondents 06 and 07. Respondents like participants 02 who view the lockdown with a wrong perception were not able to accomplish all their goals.

For interviewees that remained at work, their responses were also place in another category known as Assimilation. Assimilation is a process of adaptation according to Piaget's theory of Cognitive Development. In assimilation, people take in information from the outside world and convert it to fit in with their existing ideas and concepts. New information can sometimes be readily assimilated into an existing schema. When information fits into an existing category, it can be quickly and easily assimilated into the database. Due to the fact that they are medical personnel, made it easy for them to adjust to the COVID-19 protocol and the extended hours of work. They were also able to adjust due to the fact that they were the life line of the society during the pandemic.

The results indicted the process of assimilation which is a factor of adaptation. Assimilation is basically adding new information to existing cues that are already in the brain. The medical personnel were also exposed to the system of shifts and had firsthand understanding of the virus and how to counter its spread. This made it easy for them to adjust due to the already laid down protocols of hospitals and clinics. All participants in this section stated they faced more stress but they were able to cope due to diverse and individual reasons such as rest, support system (family and friends), medication, exercise as well as proper allocation of shifts.

This discovery is in sync with a study by Olibamoyo, Ola, Adewuya, Coker, Akintayo, and Akintayo (2021) which discovered negative change in the mental health of health workers and clamored for sustained investments in digitally enhanced health-care delivery and medical surveillance system that incorporate public mental health. The findings of Pfefferbaum (2020) revealed that samples of quarantined people and of health care providers found numerous emotional outcomes, including stress, depression, irritability, insomnia, fear, confusion, anger, frustration, boredom, and stigma associated with quarantine which correlates with the findings of this present study.

Hypothesis Three: There is significant impact of Covid-19 on Nigerian Employees' mental health after the lockdown.

As the lockdown is brought to an end, this study posits that the changes caused by the lockdown will bring about a permanent change in the mental health of Nigerian employees. The study seeks to affirm if there is indeed a change in the mental health of Nigerian employees that they will not recover from easily.

The last category of responses from interviewees that worked from home is Effects. This category focuses on the effects of the covid-19 lockdown on the mental health of individuals and their workplace. This category emphasizes on the aftermath of the lockdown phenomenon and what changes it brought due to its adaptation. The themes identified here include;

- **Psychological Changes:** The interviewees discussed on the psychological changes that lockdown brought their lives and workplaces as a result of adapting to it. For those who were at work, the interviewees talked about how the pandemic affect them and the institutes of work significantly.
- **Physical Changes:** The interviewees also discussed on the physical changes that the lockdown phenomenon had brought about and what was new and what was removed in their place of work.
- **Review:** The interviewees were asked on if things could ever go back to the way things were as a result of their adaptation and if things were better now than before the lockdown.

The responses of the participants showed the effects of the pandemic. Psychologically, certain percentage of respondents in this section like participants 01, 05 and 06 posited that there was increase in fear and anxiety during the lockdown period. Some participants such as respondents 02 and 07 posited they felt no change in their minds and in their place of work. Other participants such as respondents 08 and 11 posited that the pandemic gave them a new experience. In terms of physical changes, participants stated that the pandemic brought about new infrastructural changes and improvements in their workplace. Lastly, all participants were of the opinion that things will never be the same again after the covid-19 pandemic.

Talevi, Succi, Carai, Carnaghi, Faleri, Trebbi, & Pacitti (2020) carried out a study on mental health outcomes of the covid-19 pandemic. The results showed significant impact on mental health and the authors posited that support systems are among psychological first aid for victims of Covid-19. This is evident in the results as interviewees claimed they were able to endure stress due to support from friends and family. A study by Usher, Bhullar, Jackson (2020) which examined the covid-19 pandemic and mental health impacts showed that fear and intolerance of uncertainty led to negative societal behaviours. This correlates with the findings of the current study that poor/negative attitude to the lockdown led to negative behaviours such as lack of attainment of goals.

Conclusion

It was concluded from the study that the Covid-19 pandemic had significant impacts on the mental health of employees who had to work both physically and off-site during the national lockdown. The findings of the study established that has been a change in mental health and employers are advised to take note of this change and evaluate employees' current mental health state. This means that the workers you knew before the lockdown are not the same workers you are seeing after the lockdown. This is because the employees have gone through experiences that have led to change in their mental health and that employers of labour must take note of this factor because an individual productivity is dependent on his/her mental health. This study showed how their new mental capacity will influence their working capability and workforce output moving forward. This study reveals that there is a need to consider how the affected mental health of workers will influence work behaviour, productivity, and turnout.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

Psychological aid in terms of support systems (family and friends) as well emergency hotline for mental health issues should be promoted and emphasized. The results of the study showed that support systems helped people to be able to cope and adapt during the pandemic. Therefore, people should be educated on the benefits of social support and how to improve relationships with family and friends.

The study also recommends that people speak up if they face any mental challenges. The challenges can be hurting and can significantly affect an individual's demeanor and ability to face life's struggles and challenges because without speaking up, only the individual will know something is wrong with him/her which can affect relationships, work productivity, and general life orientations. Adequate infrastructure for combating the spread of the virus and other emerging health emergencies should be made available in clinics and hospitals. The pandemic established how inadequate our healthcare infrastructures are. Government needs to invest more in

the health sector.

There should be proper allocation of shifts and batches so that no one will be overworked and everyone will have time to rest. Hospitals should ensure the personnel are equally assigned to shifts that are profitable to them to prevent office burnout. The populace should be sensitized on mental health and its importance. The people should be educated on the preventive measures against covid-19 and on tips that will help improve their immune system against diseases and viruses.

Government should make plans against any other pandemic that might arise in the future. As the pandemic cases reduce, government should not relent but come up with preventive measures and emergency counteractions in case of another pandemic.

This study also recommends that there is need for further research on the positive and negative impacts of the covid-19 pandemic lockdown on other participants such as students, families, and corporate organizations. When further research is carried out, it will pave way for creation of new interventions and therapy, and greater understanding of the subject.

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