

NON-FORMAL EDUCATION STRATEGIES FOR CURBING THE SPREAD OF CONTAGIOUS DISEASES IN SUB-URBAN COMMUNITIES OF RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper discussed non formal education strategies for the control and management of contagious diseases in sub-urban communities in Rivers State. The authors established that in recent time, contagious diseases like Monkey Pox, Ebola, Lassa fever and COVID-19, have been spreading in both urban and sub-urban communities in Rivers State like every other states of the country. These diseases are infectious and being transmitted from person to person through several means, are capable of becoming endemic or pandemic. The authors reviewed literature on non- formal education, contagious disease, mode by which the diseases are spread and the effects of contagious diseases on residents of sub urban communities in Rivers State. The paper then examined some non-formal education strategies for the control and management of the diseases. The authors concluded that putting these strategies in use will help curb the spread of contagious diseases in the sub-urban communities of Rivers State.

Keywords: Strategies, Non-Formal Education, Contagious diseases, Sub-Urban Communities.

Introduction

Nigeria is often referred to as the “Giant of Africa”, owing to its large population and economy. With approximately 200 million inhabitants, Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and the seventh most populous country in the world. Due to the large population of Nigeria, the spread of contagious diseases is inevitable. Contagious diseases, also known as infectious diseases or transmissible diseases, are illnesses that result from the infection, presence and growth of pathogenic (capable of causing disease) biologic agents in an individual human or other animal host. It is a disease that is spread from one person to another through a variety of ways that include:

contact with blood and bodily fluids; breathing in an airborne virus; or by being bitten by an insect. Such diseases can cause a large number of people to get sick and are caused by germs like bacteria, viruses, fungi, parasites or toxins. Agents that can cause contagious diseases are spread in a number of ways including physical contact with an infected person, through contact with skin (staphylococcus aureus), sexual contact (chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis), fecal/oral contact (rotavirus), or respiratory droplets (influenza, mumps, COVID-19) contact with a contaminated surface or object (norovirus), food (salmonella, E. coli), blood (HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C), or water (cholera) (Manatu, H. 2017).

Over times, Nigeria has witnessed serious and severe cases of various epidemics caused by contagious disease. In December 2016 in Zamfara State, there was an outbreak of Meningitis, which was not reported to the national level until two months into the outbreak. By this time, the number of reported cases began to escalate rapidly, and the situation did not look good; hundreds of new cases of meningitis were reported weekly through the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC). Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) is the national public health agency with the responsibility of preventing, detecting and responding to disease outbreaks. The NCDC led a multi-partner team to control this outbreak, which was ultimately achieved, though not without the loss of over 1,000 lives.

In 2017, like never before, Nigeria was faced with several outbreaks of contagious disease ranging from Cerebrospinal Meningitis, Lassa fever, Yellow fever, Cholera and Monkeypox. There was definitely no quiet period for the NCDC. It was from one outbreak into another, making the agency worked tirelessly to protect the country, while at the same time strengthening its own capacity to effectively protect the health of Nigerians. (NCDC, 2017)

In September 2017, an unusual outbreak emerged; Nigeria faced an outbreak of Monkeypox. This disease had not been detected in Nigeria since the seventies. Further investigations showed that it may actually have been circulating in Nigeria for some time, but could have been under-reported or misdiagnosed in recent years. The last large outbreak of Yellow fever in Nigeria is reported to have occurred over thirty years ago, but in 2017, there were reports of 'strange illnesses and deaths' in Kwara and Kogi States, revealing the re-emergence of Yellow fever due to the low

immunization coverage rates in many parts of the country.

Towards the end of 2019, not just Nigeria, but the world at large has been faced with a serious global pandemic that has threatened all facet of life, the Corona Virus. Corona virus, a contagious disease that was first noticed in China in November 2019 was brought into Nigeria by an Italian citizen who worked in Nigeria and returned from Milan, Italy to Lagos, Nigeria on the 25th of February 2020 (NCDC, 2020). On Friday, 12th June, 2020, the NCDC reported that Nigeria has tested 88,432 samples and confirmed 14,554 cases. 9,673 were still active while 4,494 cases had been treated and discharged. As at 19th August, 2020, Rivers State has recorded 2,007 cases out of which 57 deaths had been recorded (NCDC, 2020).

In Rivers State, sub-urban communities like Emohua, Allu, Eleme, Choba, Obigbo and Omagwa have all been affected by the devastating effects of this global pandemic. Socio- economic, religious, educational and cultural activities have all been suspended due to this contagious disease. If this pandemic is not controlled, the resulting effects will be disheartening.

It should be noted that scholars and health experts have consensually posited that one of the ways to control these contagious diseases is through education of the populace who are prone to spreading the diseases. Successive governments and their agencies in Nigeria and Rivers State in particular had overtime, relied on formal education and the electronic media (Radio and Television) as major strategies for the control of contagious diseases. With these strategies, not much had been achieved as revealed by the poor response of Nigerians to the current challenges created by Covid-19. This is where non-formal education comes to play

since it has been established that formal education alone cannot adequately take care of the national need, especially as it concerns the adult and the out-of-school segments of the population. Using Non formal education to curb the spread of contagious diseases in sub urban communities of Rivers State, therefore, becomes the focus of this discourse.

Non-Formal Education

The understanding of Non-Formal Education (NFE) varies from country to country because of the cross-sectoral, multi-beneficiary and its content-specific nature. In some, it is limited to out-of-school while in some it is concerned with adult literacy initiatives. UNICEF in Ojo, R.C (2015) described NFE as any organized educational activity outside the established formal system, whether operating separately or as an important feature of some broader activity with a view to serving identifiable learning clientele and learning objectives. According to UNESCO (2007), NFE can be described as any organized and sustained educational activities that do not correspond exactly to the definition of formal education. As noted by Oyebamiji (2005 and 2006) non-formal education is any organized systematic educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected type of learning to particular sub-groups in the population of adults as well as children. It is an organized education for out of school youths and adults outside the formal school system.

Eaton (2010) submitted that non-formal education is an organized education that (even if it is only loosely organized) may or may not be guided by a formal curriculum. This type of education may be led by a qualified teacher or by a leader with more experience. Though it does not result in formal degree or diploma, non-formal

education is highly enriching and builds on individual's skills and capacities.

Non-Formal Education as a form of educational system is different from formal education system in terms of purpose, timing, content, delivery and control. According to study lecture note.com accessed in May, 2020, non-formal education is always organized and well planned, out-of-school learning, an open-ended education system, courses/curriculum may not be structured, highly flexible in terms of age, time and curriculum, involves both private and public sector, emphasised self learning, does not emphasise examination, not certificate oriented, need based, usually on part-time and it is supplementary and complementary to formal education. It is community related education and democratic with substantial control vested in participants and the local community.

Objectives of Non-Formal Education

The objectives of non-formal education as stated in Arikpo, Taiwo, & Ojuah (2007) are to:

- (i) cater for out-of-school children and early leavers;
- (ii) enable the learners to learn basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic so as to make them self-reliant in day-to-day life;
- (iii) develop general awareness about the socio-economic problems of local, state and national importance so as to seek solutions;
- (iv) enrich knowledge/experiences in the vocations/professions in which the clientele is involved by utilizing local and outside resources;
- (v) develop basic skills to handle/repair modern ordinary gadgets with which the learners are familiar and have access to and

- (vi) develop desirable personal and social habits as well as healthy attitudes towards our cherished national ideas and values.

The objectives as stated above were summarised into three by NMEC & UNICEF (2010) as follows:

- (a) The provision of access to education to the less privileged members of society for better productivity;
- (b) Equipping the less privileged citizens with literacy skills that would make them effective in their various communities as they carry out their day-to-day socio-economic and political activities. This, according to Eheazu (2013), would include the development of nominal environmental literacy among the less privileged group and
- (c) Inculcating in the target groups, the values of education.

Types of Non-Formal Education Programme

Non-formal education activities may include but not limited to early-childhood education, literacy, equivalent schooling, life-skill training, income generation, rural development, further professional development, religious education, cultural/traditional education, environmental and basic health education.

NMEC & UNICEF (2010) and Oyebamiji and Animashaun (2013) identified literacy, post literacy, continuing education, vocational education and community education as non-formal education programmes

Contagious Disease

A contagious disease is a subset category of transmissible diseases, which are transmitted to other persons, either by physical contact with the person suffering the disease, or by casual contact with their secretions or

objects touched by them or airborne route among other routes (Merriam-Webster dictionary). Contagiousness varies between diseases. Contagious diseases can cause epidemics and pandemics which have the potential to overwhelm the capacity of communities with serious health and socio-economic consequences. The most common transmissions include:

Person-to-Person

Pathogens that go from one person to another can be transmitted a number of ways, such as through respiratory droplets like coughing or sneezing, sexual activity, contact with blood, or from mother to child during pregnancy, birth, or breastfeeding. Active illness where you are sneezing or coughing a lot can give the microbe more opportunities to spread, but you do not have to have symptoms to be contagious. You do not even have to be around. Measles, for example, can be transmitted up to four days before you even develop the tell tale rash, and the virus can stay in the air for as long as two hours after you have left the room.

Vectors

Some microbes are not spread from person-to-person, but rather along a more circuitous person-vector-person path. Responsible for millions of illnesses each year, mosquitoes are one of the world's most common vectors. Malaria, for example, is spread through mosquitoes' infection, after biting someone with the disease, and then they, in turn, pass the parasite onto the next person they bite. The presence of mosquitoes alone is not enough to spread diseases. They are merely the pass-through. If there are not any people around with malaria, the mosquitoes can not spread the disease.

Fomites

Some diseases do not even need a living thing to infect new people - just a surface to hang onto. One of the reasons hand-washing

is so important to prevent disease is because there is a ton of objects we touch every day that are rife with germs that can make you sick. During cold and flu season, absentmindedly wiping a runny nose and then touching a door knob is a common way for the viruses to hop a ride to the next person. When you come behind them to open the same door, the viruses get onto your skin and wait for an opportunity to get inside your body when you touch your nose or rub your eyes.

Contamination

A particularly gross way germs travel is referred to as fecal-oral - that is, through something contaminated by fecal matter. For instance, a door knob is contaminated by a person who does not wash his/her hands after going to the bathroom. This can infect someone else who might touch the same door knob and then put that hand in his/her mouth.

Contagious diseases infections depend on immune system of each person. This may occur if one is taking steroids or other medications that suppress the immune system, such as anti-rejection drugs for a transplanted organ, if one has HIV or AIDS or if one has certain types of cancer or other disorders that affect ones' immune system. In addition, certain other medical conditions may predispose someone to infection, including implanted medical devices, malnutrition and extreme of age, among others. Most contagious diseases have only minor complications. But some infections - such as pneumonia, AIDS and meningitis can become life-threatening. Examples of contagious disease are:

1. Noro Virus (Stomach Flu)
2. Influenza
3. Meningitis
4. Hand, Foot and Mouth Disease (HFMD)
5. Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

6. Tuberculosis (TB)

7. Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19)

Sub-Urban Communities in Rivers State

Rivers State is one of the 36 states of Nigeria. According to the National Population Commission census data released in 2006, the state has a population of 5,198,716, making it the sixth-most populous state in the Nigeria. Over the period from 2006, the population of Rivers State has increased close to 3 million people. Details of the population figure shows that 2,673,026 were male and 2,525,690 were female. Adolescents and adults aged 15 to 64 years accounted for 61% of the population in the state. Children below the age of 15 accounted for 36% of the population, and those aged 65 years and above, another 3%. Its capital and largest city, Port Harcourt, is economically significant as the centre of Nigeria's oil industry. According to Rivers State Government (2012), the State is bounded on the South by the Atlantic Ocean, to the North by Imo, Abia and Anambra States, to the East by Akwa Ibom State, and to the West by Bayelsa and Delta States. It is home of many ethnic groups like Ikwerre, Ijaw, Ogoni, Kalabari and many other minority ethnic groups. Administratively, Rivers State has three senatorial districts and 23 local government areas (LGAs). Each senatorial district is made up of seven to eight LGAs. Approximately, three quarters of the population reside in rural areas. The predominant occupations of the people are fishing, farming and petty trading. Port Harcourt and Obio/Akpor had the highest number of inhabitants of any local government area, while Ogu-Bolo and Omuma had the lowest. The total land area of the state was 11,077 km² and the density was 635.89 inh. per km².

Port Harcourt, the capital city of Rivers State is surrounded by sub-urban communities

like; Emuoha, Allu, Eleme, Obigbo, Omagwa and so on. Because of the closeness of these communities to the capital city, they possess similar characteristics with the city in terms of high density of population, heterogeneity, anonymity, mobility and transiency, formality of relations, regimentation of life, sanitation and basic health challenges.

In most of the sub urban communities, the effects of COVID-19 as contagious disease are seriously felt in the health and socio-economic activities of the residents. Recently, due to the corona virus outbreak in the state, worship centres have been closed, educational institutions have been under lock, markets and other economic activities have been shut down, people have been sick and families have lost their loved ones. If COVID-19 and other contagious diseases are not curbed, the future effects will be much more devastating on the residents of the communities and the state at large. This, therefore, brings to the fore the need to put in place sustainable strategies that will have long and overwhelming effects on the knowledge and ability of the people to manage and control contagious diseases like COVID-19 and others.

Strategies of Non Formal Education for Curbing Contagious Diseases in Sub-Urban Communities in Rivers State

Non formal education presents various strategies that are very applicable to knowledge dissemination to the clientele in the sub-urban communities. Such strategies include:

Mass Mobilization (also known as social mobilization or community mobilization). This refers to the mobilization of population. Mass mobilization as a non-formal education strategy engages and motivates a wide range of partners and allies at national and local levels to raise awareness of and demand for

a particular development objective through face-to-face dialogue (Holly, 2019). Members of institutions, community networks, civic and religious groups and others work in a coordinated way to reach specific groups of people for dialogue with planned messages. In other words, social mobilization has the capacity to facilitate change through a range of players engaged in interrelated and complementary efforts. Community mobilization is essentially a process for reaching out to different sectors of a community and creating partnerships in order to focus on, and ultimately address, a pressing issue such as an epidemic of a contagious disease. Community mobilization educates community members and groups on how to prevent the spread of these diseases. This can be done by mobilizing necessary resources, disseminating health related information, generating support, and fostering cooperation across public and private sectors in the community. Mobilization efforts are often described in literature as “building community or collaborative partnerships,” “community engagement or involvement,” or “coalition building.” Though some of these terms refer to specific structures, the underlying goal of engaging a wide-range of community members to create and implement a shared vision is the same. Community partners implement community action plan by pooling and leveraging resources, including skills, funds, and other assets to enhance the ability of the individuals and the community as a whole to address local and national challenges including curbing the spread of contagious diseases.

Participatory Strategy: Participatory strategy is a strategy in which end users of a programme are fully involved in the actualization of the end results. The members are involved in the planning of the

programme from the start to the end. The active participation of beneficiaries in decision making and planning of their non-formal education programmes is highly emphasized. Using participatory strategy to curb the spread of contagious disease in sub urban communities in Rivers State entails the community members deciding on the choice of the health programme, being part of resource mobilization and deciding on the best method/process of implementation. They are also involved in both the formative and summative evaluation. By this, the community members develop we-feeling towards the programme and wholeheartedly work for the success of the programme. Participatory strategy also promotes programme sustainability since in the process of participation, the participants are not only educated, they also acquire the knowledge and skill to repeat such programme in future.

Awareness campaign: Awareness campaign typically is a sustained effort to educate individuals and boost public information and knowledge bank on a community cause or issue. In almost every instance, awareness campaign often targets people who share the same beliefs and values on a particular problem. There are various communication/awareness creation tools available for this strategy. Awareness campaign can be through periodic town hall meetings, market squares meetings, age grade meetings and so on. It can adopt either traditional or modern means of communication. In awareness campaign strategy, mono-objective is focused. This is to avoid confusion. The language of knowledge content dissemination must be simple (usually local language or any language freely and commonly used by the target audience). In the case of sub-urban

communities in Rivers State, the Pidgin English is recommended.

A well-executed awareness campaign programme will accomplish public awareness, increase enthusiasm and support, stimulate self-mobilization and action, and mobilize local knowledge and resources. Awareness raising requires strategies of effective communication to reach the desired outcome. The aim of awareness raising campaigns most often differs between contexts but generally includes increase concern, informing the targeted audience, creating a positive image, and attempts to change their behaviour and way of life that can increase the spread of contagious diseases. Getting community members educated on the dangers of spreading contagious disease is a very important step in curbing it.

Basic and functional literacy: Basic and functional literacy could be seen as the ability of individuals to possess the reading and writing skills that are adequate to manage daily living and employment/vocational tasks that require reading skills beyond a basic level. Functional literacy equips an adult with the basic reading and writing skills to enable the adult take basic life decisions. If community members have the basic and functional literacy skills, their sources and scope of information gathering on contagious diseases will be widened. Analysis and usage of such information become simple. Rumours, misinformation and disinformation are easily defeated among functionally literate people. This strategy is usually site or workshop-based learning. Apart from promoting the daily occupation of the community members, themes or issues of concern, such as COVID-19 or any other contagious disease can be introduced. Interest in the programme is usually sustained because the

programme is always centred round the occupation of the participants, apart from the health issue that is the main goal of the programme organizers. Thus, basic and functional literacy as a non-formal education strategy has the capacity to cater for the objectives of the organizers and the participants at the same time.

Community Education: Community education, also known as community-based education or community learning is a programme designed to promote learning and social development work with individuals and groups in their communities, using a range of formal and informal methods. A common defining feature is that programmes and activities are developed in dialogue with communities and participants. The purpose of community learning and development is to develop the capacity of individuals and groups of all ages through their actions and the capacity of community, to improve their quality of life. Community education emphasizes the culture and value system of the concerned community in addressing contemporary socio-economic, environmental, health and other related problems.

Community education encompasses all those occupations and approaches that are concerned with running education and development programmes within local communities, rather than within educational institutions such as schools, colleges and universities. Community education programme is a comprehensive and coordinated plan for providing educational, recreational, social and cultural services for all people in the community. It is usually based on what the people already know and practice, using local tools and resources including locally trained resource person to educate the community members on issues under focus.

Mass media/ICT: The mass media, by communicating with people in large numbers, can have a huge impact on the public's knowledge, beliefs, perceptions, attitudes and behaviours, not only as individuals but also as families, communities and wider society. The power and reach of mass media can influence all aspects of people's lives, including health and well-being, and can be harnessed to promote health by informing, motivating and empowering people to change behaviour and by providing a platform for advocating healthier policies and civic actions. Mass media/ICT play crucial role in disseminating health information and increasing awareness about health education. Media not only spread awareness, but also inform and educate people over a period of time. This ultimately helps in the change of attitude and behaviour of community members for achieving better health.

Conclusion

Contagious diseases are diseases that can be spread from one person to another and cause a large number of people to get sick. They are caused by germs like bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites. With the present rate at which contagious disease is spreading fast in sub urban communities in Rivers State, if not properly curbed, can bring devastating effects on all the sectors and life of the people. COVID-19 is currently the main public health concern in all the thirty-six states of Nigeria. The impacts of this disease are enormous, owing to the fact that it has lockdown so many sectors of the state, and the Rivers State government has been adopting various strategies to control the spread of the disease. One of the ways government and other concerned organizations should adopt is the non-formal education strategies. With any of the non-formal education strategies discussed in this

paper, we can effectively get communities members involved in preventing the spread of contagious diseases.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion, the following recommendations are made;

1. Awareness campaign and Mass media should be used in sensitizing community members on the dangers of contagious diseases and the effects it will have on their communities if the diseases are not controlled.
2. Community members should be involved in curbing the spread of contagious diseases using participatory strategy. When community members are involved in the planning and implementation of health-related community programmes or projects they tend to be more committed and the programme/project objectives become achievable.
3. For the prevention of the spread of contagious diseases in sub-urban communities in Rivers State, basic and functional literacy should be made compulsory in these communities to give the least person the basic education of reading and writing.

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