

Coronavirus Pandemic and Market Women in Ondo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study adopted survey design to investigate the activities of market women in the face of COVID-19 pandemic. Convenience sampling technique was used to select 100 women, selling and buying from the market during COVID-19 era in Akoko South-West Local Government Area of Ondo State. The instrument for data collection was self-constructed questionnaire titled “women, market and the issues of corona virus”. The validity was established by experts, and the reliability was determined using test-retest method, which produced a Pearson product moment correlation coefficient of 0.76. Three hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The hypotheses were tested using t-test analysis. The result indicated that there was a significant difference between pre-COVID-19 market activities and post COVID-19 market activities. The result also showed that there was significant difference between the perceptions of women who were buying and those who were selling during COVID-19 market activities, and finally the result revealed that there was significant difference between the emotional state of market women before and during COVID-19 period. It was suggested that both market women and women buying from the market should be sensitized on how to cope in the era because things may not be the same again.

Keywords: Resilience, Coping, Strategies, Coronavirus, Women

Introduction

Daily activities of market women all over Nigeria were stable and peaceful until the first confirmed case of coronavirus pandemic disease was announced on 27th February, 2020. It was reported that an Italian citizen in Lagos tested positive to the virus on 9th March, 2020. The situation made the Nigerian government and the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) to start taking measures to control the spread of the disease. Market activities have been going on smoothly in all the states, until the federal government declared the stay-at-home order for all the states, closing all schools and activities in the country. Following this development, the Ondo state government

banned all political, religious and social gathering in the state for fourteen days. Later, inter-state movements were also banned. This development affected the market women from other states from coming to Ondo State. Market women were restricted to their locations. Many markets were closed down; only those selling food items were allowed to operate.

According to Owusu (2007), market is seen as a place of day to day activities, a space provided for societal processes, where people are allowed to interact for monetary gain and local languages thrive and identity plays an important role in creating sense of belonging. To Mang (2013), a market is defined as informal setting, where majority of people are self –employed and having no fixed income. It is a place of financial interactions for people of different religious and ethnic background. Aluko (2003) observed that there is informal and formal economy. Although market as an informal economy is a rural phenomenon, a large proportion of urban who are self-employed, also engage in trading, farming, home industry and services. Akintoye (2007) confirmed that informal sector of the economy provides employment for about 61% of the urban labour force in developing countries, majority of such labour force being women. Women who seem not to be educated or women who have not been opportune to have formal jobs got themselves gainfully employed in the informal economy in order to provide cash for their families and themselves. Getting involved in market activities seem the only way women who are not educated or who are poor use to survive and earn a livelihood. Aina (1984) confirmed that domestic tasks and income generation activities at the informal level have implications for the well-being of the child. In other words, if the mother is engaged economically, the child benefits from the proceeds of her sales.

Market phenomenon in the traditional setting is an important aspect for women in any culture. Traditionally, women are more in the market than their male counterparts; this is because food items are basically the most common items in the local market. In Ondo state, there are different categories of markets. There are everyday markets, every five days market, there are markets for particular items. Some market women used to travel to the farm to bring some items to the city to sell. Things were going on smoothly before the outbreak of the pandemic, which affected their operations.

It has been observed that “the basis for the vulnerability of women, especially rural and indigenous women to chronic poverty, is found in discriminatory labour markets and the social exclusion of political and economic institution”. One of the consequences of the quarantine implemented in many countries at the wake of COVID-19 has been the increment in the unpaid salary for workers. Changes in markets and consumption patterns caused by COVID-19 could exacerbate the level of vulnerability due to a sudden reduction in demand and markets for the sale of

agricultural products, thus reducing available income. Furthermore, the restriction on movements prevents women from carrying out agricultural and livestock activities and obtaining essential resources for their families (e.g. water, firewood, natural food resources, etc.), putting both their well-being and that of their families at risk.

Women at the period of COVID-19 sometimes face serious risk to life, since there is total lockdown and those market women must proceed with their goods and selling; they have to travel to where raw material for their business is available, they have to risk their life by travelling through the bush to avoid coming in contact with the law enforcement agents; sometimes, they have accident because of poor terrain the buses are plying; some hoodlums lay ambush for them and dispossessed them of their monetary possession and sometimes cause bodily harm to them.

Coronavirus is a deadly disease that causes infection in human and various animals which include birds and mammals such as camels, cat and bats (Ajani, 2020). The outbreak of this pandemic started in a Chinese city of Wuhan, capital of Hubei province. This strange disease is having similar symptoms with malaria fever, coughing and breathing difficulties (Ajani, 2020). Observations have revealed that the elderly and people with existing chronic condition appear to be vulnerable to serious symptoms (Ajani, 2020). The nature of the spread of the virus is the major reason for the stay at home order given by both Federal and states governments in Nigeria. It spreads from human to human via small droplets. This can be released when someone coughs or sneezes; as the virus, through the droplets, ends up in the air, on objects and surfaces. Anyone who inhales these droplets or gets them through their hands into the mouth, nose or eyes can become infected with the virus.

Social distance seems to help in reducing the infectious. By keeping more than a metre away from the sick people, not touching ones face as often as possible and paying attention to good hand hygiene can also be of help in reducing the spread of the virus. The infectious nature of the disease made its control difficult and that is the reason for the stay at home orders. So, if people stay at home, what is the implication of this to the market women, to married women, business people and their products? It got to a stage that weekly market was closed down and only daily markets were allowed to function in some southwest states. The reason is because daily market attracts relatively low patronage as against the weekly markets. Observation reveals that there were standard cycles for markets in Nigeria for centuries. It could be 3-6 days cycle, 4-8 days cycle, 5-7 days cycle market. This pandemic came and put an end to the weekly roaster; this made it difficult for many market women to bear. Nigerian women seemed to have shown capacity to survive in difficult situations, especially during conflicts, by developing ways of coping in life (Bonkat, 2014). Before the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, market women have witnessed lots of conflicts and crises,

especially religious and ethnic clashes. The outbreak of the pandemic came not as a shock but in another dimension because everywhere is affected all together, it seems as if there is nowhere to run to.

According to Prince (2008), resilience is multidimensional and complex concept that can manifest differently for different people as they respond to challenging situations. It is about how people not only survive but how they live rewarding lives despite facing challenges. Fuller, McGraw and Goodyear (1999) see resilience as bounce back ability or a fuller ability to bungee jump through life. According to Bonanno (2005), resilience is a factor that enables people to survive and adapt to adverse circumstances. It includes receiving assistance and giving it to others, assertiveness/tenacity, self-counselling, co-dependence, locus of control, mentoring, problem-solving and creativity. In the view of Reed-Victor and Stronge (2002), resilience is the dynamic process of adaptation despite adversity. Norris et al (2008) defined resilience as a process linking a set of adaptive capacities to a positive trajectory of function, an adaptation after a disturbance.

Hambrook (2000) sees creativity as the inner eye and inner ear. It helps individuals to be aware of what lies beneath the surface of communication and behaviour. The author believes that when the individual gets in touch with the inner zone, the inner self is liberated. Creativity helps individuals to try something new, and being creative helps individuals to be opened to experience, to be flexible in thinking and to be able to deal with conflicting information.

The authors interacted with a market woman who had been selling fairly used clothes for more than ten years in a weekly market in the third week of the lockdown. She explained that people were biased about the items because a lot of information had been going on in the social media that some fairly used clothes had been imported to Nigeria. Consequently, her customers no longer patronise her.

Secondly, the police were also disturbing her so she could not sell her wares. She then used her creative skills to change to another item. She opted for crayfish because food items were encouraged to be sold by the government. According to her, she will keep selling crayfish until the pandemic is over. Many would have used their creative skills to strategize, but barriers to creativity hinder them, in addition to the limitation imposed on them by some cultural beliefs which demand that they should enquire for the best job or trade that suits their destiny because that is what determines whether or not they will prosper. Emotional feeling is another barrier to creativity which includes the fear of being ridiculed by others, the fear of low patronage, the fear of error and the need for security and risk taking.

To Mellody, Miller and Miller (1989), co-depending refers to the relationship that develops between persons who through learned behaviour become so inordinately focused or preoccupied with living for the significant people in their lives that they neglect their own lives. Many poor people and some market women seem to complain that the government should be responsible for their wellbeing since they are not allowed to run their life the way they would have liked it.

According to Stewart (2013), reality therapy is based on the idea that individuals are responsible for what they do. Responsible behaviour is defined as that which satisfies one's needs while at the same time not denying others from satisfying theirs. Reality therapy focuses on the present and upon getting people to understand that all choices are made in order to meet needs.

According to the proponent of the theory (Glasser, 1985), there are basic needs that drive human beings and they are genetic and all that man is doing is aimed at meeting these needs. The four psychological needs are discussed below:

1. Belonging: loving, sharing and cooperating; satisfying this need can involve a combination of any of family, friends, groups, and classes, pet, plants and so on.
2. Power: satisfaction of this need is achieved by the acquisition of status, recognition and obedience of others. This can conflict with the need to belong because it leads to relationships that can easily become power struggles.
3. Freedom: we all need some freedom of choice about how to live our lives or at least some parts of it, for example choosing friends, how we express ourselves, and choice of occupation.
4. Our behaviour must not prevent others from satisfying their needs too.

COVID-19 pandemic came with barriers and challenges because of the various changes that happened to everyone. Some of what market women and other women in the market passed through during the period include:

1. Loss of customers: Many market women experience reduction in patronage because of the lockdown, People were restricted to particular location to sell.
2. Difficulty in transporting goods and difficulty in getting to the market. Due to the lockdown directive, many market women and other women find it difficult to transport their goods within and outside their states. Many goods got spoilt in the process and many market women were affected emotionally.
3. Breakdown of vehicles: Many vehicles broke down in the process of transporting foodstuffs to the consumers. Due to shortage of vehicles on the road, they were stranded for many hours before they were rescued.
4. Police Interruption: In order to ensure that social distancing is maintained, the police chased market women and other women and they were prevented from gathering together in large numbers. This greatly affects the sales of goods.

5. Accident: Minor accidents occurred and some market women sustained injuries while trying to escape arrest and prosecution by the police and other law enforcement agents.

According to Holzmann (2001), coping strategies are designed to relieve the impact of the risk when they occurred. Most market women made use of telephone to contact their colleagues for help to get some goods. Apart from that, customers were also contacted through their phones. Many market women had to relocate to their different homes to sell their goods because it was becoming difficult to sell their goods in the market. Some relocated to the village to stay until the COVID-19 pandemic is over. The government only approved the sales of food items for the period, and this made some market women to change their previous items to food items because food items sell faster than any other item simply because of the restriction on other items. Some market women had to sell some of their items on credit for their customers because many had delayed salaries, many could not have access to their money in the bank because of lockdown order.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated for this study:

Ho1: There is no significant difference between pre-COVID-19 market activities and COVID-19 market activities.

Ho2: There is no significant difference on the perceptions on contracting the virus between women who are buying and those who are selling during COVID-19 market activities.

Ho3: There is no significant difference between the emotional state of market women before and during COVID-19 period.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population consisted of all the market women and other women in Akoko South-West Local Government Area of Ondo State. Convenience sampling was used to select 100 market women in Akoko South-West Local Government Area of Ondo State, as the sample of the study. The instrument for data collection was a self-constructed questionnaire titled "Market, Women and COVID-19." The instrument was divided into sections; section A contains personal data of the respondents, while section B contains the item to answer the questions raised. The face and content validity of the instrument was ascertained by experts. Test-retest technique was used by the researchers to ascertain reliability. The questionnaire was distributed to twenty market women in Akoko North-East Local Government Area which was outside the study area. After a two-week interval, the same instrument was re-administered to the same set of women and Pearson product

moment correlation was used to determine the correlation coefficient which was 0.76. Data gathered for this study was analyzed using t-test.

Presentation of results

Ho1: There is no significant difference between pre-COVID-19 market women activities and COVID-19 market women activities.

Table 1: t-test Analysis of difference between pre-COVID-19 market activities and COVID-19 market activities

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-cal	t-tab	Decision
Pre-COVID 19	100	62.60	2.8038	98	2.879	1.567	Significant
COVID-19		65.30	2.8038				

Table 1 revealed that the calculated t (2.879) is greater than the t-critical (1.567) at 0.05 level of significance. Thus, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference between pre-COVID-19 market activities and COVID-19 market activities is rejected. This implies that there is significant difference between pre COVID-19 activities and COVID-19 activities.

Ho2: There is no significant difference on the perceptions on contracting the virus between women who are buying and those who are selling during COVID-19 market activities.

Table 2: t-test Analysis of difference between the perception of women who are buying and those who are selling during COVID-19 market activities

Variable	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	t-tab	Decision
Women selling	50	62.60	2.8038	98	1.675	0.567	Significant
Women buying	50	65.30	5.6347				

Table 2 revealed that the calculated t (1.675) is greater than the t-critical (0.567) at 0.05 level of significance. Thus, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference between the perceptions of women who are buying and those who are selling during COVID-19 market activities is rejected. This implies that women who were buying and selling during COVID -19 are not having the same perceptions of contracting the disease.

Ho3: There is no significant difference between the emotional state of market women before and during COVID-19 period.

Table 3: T-test Analysis of difference between the emotional state of market women before and during COVID-19 period

Variable	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	t-tab	Decision
Emotional state before	100	62.60	2.8038	98	1.978	1.567	Significant
Emotional state during		65.30	5.6347				

Table 3 revealed that the calculated t (1.978) is greater than the t-critical (1.567) at 0.05 level of significance. Thus, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference between the emotional state of market women and other women during COVID-19 is rejected. This implies that the emotional state of market women and other women were affected during COVID-19 period.

Discussion of the findings

The findings of the study revealed that there was significant difference between pre-COVID-19 market activities and COVID-19 market activities. This is in line with Aluko (2003) who opined that one of the consequences of the quarantine implemented in many countries at the wake of COVID-19 has been the increment in the unpaid salary for workers, changes in markets and consumption patterns caused by COVID-19 which exacerbate the level of vulnerability due to a sudden reduction in demand and markets for the sale of agricultural products, thus reducing available income.

The findings of the study also revealed that there was significant difference on the perception on contracting the disease between women who are buying and those who are selling during COVID-19 market activities. This is in line with Bonkat (2014) who averred that Nigerian women seemed to have shown capacity to survive in difficult situations, especially during conflicts, by developing ways of coping in life before the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. The outbreak of the pandemic came not as a shock but in another dimension because everywhere is affected all together; it affected their perception on contracting the disease during their market activities.

Finally, finding of the study revealed that there was significant difference between the emotional state of market women before and during COVID-19 period. This is in line with Hambrook (2000) who sees creativity as the inner eye and inner ear that helps individuals to be aware of what lies beneath the surface of communication. It was those

who were able to maintain stable emotion by being creative during the pandemic period that seem like making success.

Conclusion

The market activities before COVID-19 cannot be compared to COVID-19 market activities; this was based on the finding of this study, which showed that there was significant difference between pre COVID-19 activities and COVID-19 activities. Secondly, the finding also showed that women who were buying and selling during COVID-19 are not having the same perceptions on contracting the disease. On this note, market women need to come to the reality that coronavirus is not a mirage but a true life situation and effort must be made to keep themselves and their family safe. They also need to develop the consciousness and understanding that their safety and that of their loved ones should be paramount to them. Proper hygienic practices must be observed even while carrying out their daily activities. To continue to survive in the face of this pandemic, market women must be resilient, adopt coping strategies and face reality by choosing the correct attitude to life.

Recommendations

1. Market women should prioritise the sales of goods that are of importance to the need of the people at this period, to avoid losing money and valuable goods.
2. Market women in the face of survival, should follow all the laid down guidelines and regulations of government, to protect themselves, their families and their buyers.
3. Sensitization campaigns should be staged for the market women by government and NGOs to help them cope with the challenges of the period.

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