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November 2020

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COVID-19 INFORMATION SEEKING STRATEGIES OF RURAL DWELLERS IN DELTA NORTH, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study assessed the COVID-19 information seeking strategies of rural dwellers in Delta North, Nigeria. This study adopted a survey research design. Fifty (50) respondents were randomly selected from each of the rural communities in Delta North used for the study, which amounted to 450 respondents used for the study. Out of the 450 copies of the questionnaire distributed to the respondents, the researcher was able to retrieve 418 copies of the questionnaire from the rural dwellers, thus there was 92% response rate. The method of data analysis adopted was descriptive statistics covering frequency count and percentage. The finding of the study revealed that the COVID-19 information needs as indicated by respondents were on general emerging news on COVID-19, COVID-19 prevention, ways of seeking medical help in the pandemic era, government policies on COVID-19, among others. It is evident from the finding that the preferred information sources on COVID-19 as indicated by the respondents are family members/ friends, mass media (Television, Radio, Newspapers, etc.), herbal doctors/ traditional healers, healthcare providers/ physicians, town criers, herb hawkers, pharmacist/ chemist, NGOs, books (print/ electronic), among others. The respondents indicated they use the COVID-19 information they seek to educate family members/ friends about current news on COVID-19, stop the spread of COVID-19 by observing precautionary measures, abide by government policies on COVID-19, understand how to seek medical help in the pandemic era, educate their kinsmen on preventive measures from the COVID-19 disease, among others. The challenges that militate against the accessibility and use of COVID-19 information as indicated by the respondents are too many fake news about COVID-19, too many contradicting information on COVID-19, non-availability of relevant information on COVID-19, communication/ Language barriers, government policies on COVID-19 are not adequately publicized, among others. It was recommended from the study that government accredited health agency platforms should publish COVID-19 information in both English and the local dialect of the rural people to ensure the information penetrate more in society. It was also recommended that researchers/ scholars and writers should desist from publishing fake and other irrelevant information on COVID-19.

Keywords: COVID-19; Information Seeking Strategies; Rural Dwellers; Delta North; Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a severe acute respiratory syndrome first discovered in an outbreak of respiratory illness cases in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. The outbreak of COVID-19 was reported to the World Health Organisation (WHO) on the 31st, of December 2019, and WHO subsequently declared COVID-19 a global health emergency of international concern on the 30th of January, 2020 (Gallegos, 2020). Furthermore, WHO declared it a pandemic on the 11th of March, 2020 due to its vast and swift spread across continents of the world (World Health Organisation, 2020). According to Shaban (2020) as of the 13th day of May 2020 every country in Africa has recorded a case of COVID-19 with alarming spread rates. Currently, Nigeria has recorded the third-highest number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Africa after South Africa and Egypt. It is worthy to note that all the 36 states of Nigeria including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) have recorded confirmed cases of COVID-19. At present, Nigeria has recorded a total of 58,460 confirmed cases, 7,454 active cases, 49,895 discharged cases, and 1,111 deaths as of the 29th of September, 2020.

However, the pandemic nature of COVID-19 and its fast spread have caused great fear and apprehension by Nigerians as to what the disease is all about, how it spreads, how it can be prevented and treated to mention only but a few. This apprehension has caused the Nigerian populace to seek more information about COVID-19 via various strategies to stay safe and prevent contracting the disease. Information seeking strategies are the methods used for obtaining information from information objects or information retrieval systems (IGI Global, 2020). Information can be obtained from diverse sources (primary, secondary and tertiary sources) depending on the available source at the disposal of the seekers. The advent of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) has made access to a wide range of information in electronic formats easier. Consequently, Xie (2007) affirmed that the new digital environment does not only prompt people to apply more than a single type of information seeking strategy but also require people to change from one information seeking strategy to another in the information search process.

The agency saddled with the responsibility of combating pandemic like the Novel Coronavirus in Nigeria is the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC). NCDC has played a great role in combating the spread of COVID-19 by making COVID-19 information available via various sources and media which include the NCDC Webpage, television jingles, newspaper columns, social media, radio, town criers, and other online sources. The availability of COVID-19 information may not automatically translate to accessibility and use in meeting information needs. For Nigerians to be able to access accurate COVID-19 information, efforts must be put into searching accredited and reliable sources to avoid misinformation as there is a lot of jargon and false information spreading rapidly on the Coronavirus disease daily. The main focus of this study is to ascertain the COVID-19 information seeking strategies of rural dwellers in Delta North, Nigeria.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Coronavirus is novel to mankind as most government and health professionals across the globe are only employing the reactive strategy by struggling to curb the spread of the disease via various strategies. Government at various levels in Nigeria are putting efforts to educate the populace on COVID-19 to keep them informed and better protected. However, the rural dwellers in Nigeria are the vulnerable set in our society characterized by underdevelopment and limited access to basic amenities that could militate against their access to COVID-19 information. The extent to which Nigerians especially those that reside in rural areas can use the information available on the COVID-19 disease is presently not known. Currently, there is paucity of studies on COVID-19 information seeking strategies of rural dwellers, most of the empirical studies available were on health information seeking strategies of the rural dwellers.

This study will provide facts on the COVID-19 information needs of rural dwellers, their preferred information sources on COVID-19, the use of COVID-19 information by rural dwellers, and the challenges that militate against the accessibility and use of COVID-19 information. The outcome of this study would enable the Nigerian government to formulate policies to improve the information seeking strategies of rural dwellers as well as proffer solutions to some of the challenges they face in the seeking and use of COVID-19 information.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study is to ascertain the COVID-19 information seeking strategies of rural dwellers in Delta North, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- ✓ Find out the COVID-19 information needs of rural dwellers in Delta North, Nigeria.
- ✓ Ascertain the preferred information sources on COVID-19 by the rural dwellers.
- ✓ Establish the use of COVID-19 information by rural dwellers.
- ✓ Determine the challenges that militate against the access and use of COVID-19 information by rural dwellers.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

- ✓ What are the COVID-19 information needs of rural dwellers in Delta North, Nigeria?
- ✓ What are the preferred information sources on COVID-19 by the rural dwellers?
- ✓ What is the use of COVID-19 information by rural dwellers?
- ✓ What are the challenges that militate against the access and use of COVID-19 information by rural dwellers?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature will be reviewed under the following headings: COVID-19 Pandemic, COVID-19 information needs of rural dwellers, preferred information sources on COVID-19 by the rural dwellers, the use of COVID-19 information by the rural dwellers, and the challenges that militate against the accessibility and use of COVID-19 information by rural dwellers.

COVID-19 Pandemic

COVID-19 is an infectious disease that originated from an outbreak in Wuhan City, China in December 2019. However, due to the swift spread of the virus across nations and continents of the world, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic on the 11th of March, 2020 (WHO, 2020). According to Resnick (2020), the most common symptoms of COVID-19 are dry cough, flu, tiredness, aches, headaches, loss of taste and smell, discoloration of fingers and toes, and rashes on the skin to mention only but a few. COVID-19 spread mainly from person to person via small droplets from the mouth or nose of an infected person whenever they cough, speaks, or sneezes (Noi, 2020). Persons can contact COVID-19 when they breathe in these droplets or touch surfaces where the droplets settle on, after which they use the same hands to touch their eyes, nose, or mouth. The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (2020) outline some measure members of the public should adhere to strictly to halt the spread of COVID-19, the measures include regular wearing of facemask/ covering when in public, frequent handwashing with soap under running water for a minimum of 20 seconds, use of alcohol-based sanitizer in the absence of water, maintain a physical distance of at least two metres from others, avoid crowded spaces, covering of mouth/ nose properly with tissue paper when coughing/ sneezing or covering properly with the elbow in the absence of tissue paper, stay at home whenever you feel unwell, as well as avoid close contact with persons showing symptoms of respiratory illness. COVID-19 affects older adults more than their younger counterparts because of their underlying conditions such as cardiovascular disease, respiratory illness, diabetes and this makes their fatality rate high when contacted with the disease (Sandoiu, 2020). Currently, there is no internationally accepted treatment for COVID-19 as WHO and other renowned pharmaceutical companies are working hard to get a vaccine soonest for the treatment of the disease.

COVID-19 Information Needs of Rural Dwellers

There is paucity of studies on the COVID-19 information needs of rural dwellers. Rural dwellers in Nigeria are the most deprived set of people in our society with inadequate access to health care services and basic amenities. However, Statista (2020) conducted a comparative study to determine the areas people need more information on COVID-19. The study covers Germany, United Kingdom, and the United States. The majority of the respondents indicated they require more information on Testing for COVID-19/ Corona, policies for travel, risks to the health, COVID-19/ Corona in general, What to do if showing symptoms for COVID-19 / Corona, shopping availability, policies for working, Policies for schools/kindergarten, among others. Clarke, Moore, Steege, Koopman, Belden, Canfield, Meadows, Elliott, and Kim (2016) studied health information needs, sources, and barriers of primary care patients. The findings of the study revealed that the most common information needs were information on an illness/ medical condition, nutrition, alternative medicines, and new/experimental treatment available. Also, Adeyoyin and Oyewusi (2015) studied the needs and utilisation of health information among young adults in Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that the majority of the respondents indicated nutrition as their major health information need, this followed by diagnosed medical condition, unsafe pregnancy, unwanted pregnancy avoidance, and HIV/AIDS infection. UNICEF (2020) opined that the elderly have other underlining illnesses

hence they require frequent health information and assistance from their younger to run errands and book appointments with a physician to ensure they get all the help they desire in this COVID-19 pandemic era.

Preferred Information Sources on COVID-19 by the Rural Dwellers

There are a lot of information sources on COVID-19 available as the Nigerian government was able to employ various strategies for sharing COVID-19 information to ensure the awareness penetrates every stratum of the society, the rich class, poor, educated, illiterate, kids, youth, and elderly, male and female, digital literate/ digital illiterate to mention only but a few. Cochrane (2020) opines that knowing health information sources to trust and which to ignore can be difficult to ascertain as a lot of information platforms we trust might publish conflicting information to the public domain causing confusion. Sokey and Adisah-Atta (2017) studied the challenges confronting rural dwellers in accessing health information in Shai Osudoku District, Ghana. The findings of the study revealed that the majority of the respondents indicated their preferred health information was family members, followed by healthcare providers, internet, health brochure, and friends. Simmons, Wu, Yang, Bush, and Crofford (2015) evaluated sources of health information among rural women in Western Kentucky. The findings of the study revealed that the majority of the respondents preferred interpersonal sources for both general (68.1%) and mental health (69.4%) information. While 11% of the respondents indicated health professionals as the primary information source. Nwagwu and Ajama (2011) studied women's health information needs and sources in a rural oil community in South-Western Nigeria. The findings revealed that respondents rely on herbs hawkers, family members/ friends, traditional healers, drug sellers, oracle home/ priest, faith healers, radio/ television, among others. Kassim and Katunzi-Mollel (2017) explored maternal health information seeking in rural Tanzania. The findings of the study revealed that the majority of the women (93%) prefer professional healthcare workers as their first choice source of health information, followed by traditional birth attendants (TBAs), and their immediate family members.

The Use of COVID-19 Information by Rural Dwellers

The use of COVID-19 information by rural dwellers will enable them to take quality decisions about the COVID-19 pandemic especially areas of its symptoms, how it can be contacted, prevention, as well as progress in the treatment of the disease. However, Chen, Orom, Hay, Waters, Schofield, Li, and Kiviniemi (2019) affirms that use refers to people's ability to make decisions that maintain/ improve their health base on the health information at their disposal. Momodu (2002) examines the health information needs and seeking behaviour of rural Nigerian communities. The findings revealed that rural dwellers use health information to handle the incidence of epidemic outbreaks, to identify good treatment options, to explore health facilities, as well as solicit government support to cater to their health needs. Medlock, Eslami, Askari, and Arts (2015) studied health information seeking behaviour of seniors who use the internet. The findings revealed that the internet was used most often for information about symptoms, prognosis, and treatment options. Oluwatuyi (2010) studied health seeking behaviour of rural dwellers in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The study revealed that the rural dwellers seek health facilities to cater mainly for their ailment affecting their health.

Challenges that militates against the access and use of COVID-19 Information by Rural Dwellers

There are a lot of challenges that militate against the use of COVID-19 information by rural dwellers. Vanderslott (2020) raised the issue of fake news about COVID-19 as they can be disseminated by trusted friends, family members, and physicians making it difficult for people to identify which sources are real and trusted. Murugathas, Sritharan, and Santharooban (2020) studied health information needs and seeking behaviour of pregnant women attending antenatal at Jaffna Teaching Hospital. The findings of the study revealed that the non-availability of relevant information, language barriers, the financial status of the family, educational level, and attitude of health professionals were identified as the challenges that militate against the use of health information by the pregnant women. Agyemang-Duah, Arthur-Holmes, Peprah, Adei, and Peprah (2020) studied the dynamics of health information seeking behaviour among the elderly with very low incomes in Ghana. The findings of the study revealed that inadequate knowledge about the benefits of seeking health information, perceived poor attitude of health workers/healthcare providers, and communication/language problems were identified as the challenges affecting the use of health information by the older adults. Ojo (2006) affirmed that a high level of illiteracy, absence of basic infrastructure, and poverty were identified as the militating factors in adopting new media for accessing and using health information. Sokey, Adjei, and Ankrah (2018) studied media use for health information dissemination to rural communities by the Ghana health service. The findings of the study revealed that lack of electricity to recharge phone battery/ or use television, Low network connectivity, Lack of understanding, Limited information source, and lack of funds are identified as the challenges in using health information.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a survey research design. The study sampled rural communities in Delta North Senatorial District of Delta State, Nigeria. Delta North is comprised of nine (9) local government areas (LGA) namely Aniocha North, Aniocha South, Ika North East, Ika South, Nndokwa East, Nndokwa West, Oshimili South, Oshimili North, and Ukwuani. A rural community from each of the LGA in Delta North were sampled for the study. The rural communities covered in the study were Idumuje-Unor (Aniocha North), Ogwashi Ukwu (Aniocha South), Owa-Oyibu (Ika North East), Agbor (Ika South), Aboh (Ndokwa East), Kwale (Ndokwa West), Okwe (Oshimili South), Akwukwu-Igbo (Oshimili North) and Umutu (Ukwuani). Fifty (50) respondents were randomly selected from each of the rural communities in Delta North used for the study, which amounted to 450 respondents used for the study. The instrument used to elicit data from the respondents was a structured questionnaire with the aid of 3 research assistants. Out of the 450 copies of the questionnaire distributed to the respondents, the researcher was able to retrieve 418 copies of the questionnaire from the rural dwellers, thus there was a 93% response rate. The method of data analysis adopted was descriptive statistics covering frequency count and percentage.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the study based on the study objectives. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics i.e. tables, frequencies, and percentages.

Questionnaire Response Rate

Table 1 revealed the response rate of the questionnaire distributed for the study.

Table 1: Summary of Response Rate according to the Rural Communities in Delta North

Communities in Delta North	No. of Questionnaire Administered	No. of Questionnaire Returned	Percentage (%) of Questionnaire Returned
Idumuje-Unor	50	40	9%
Ogwashi Ukwu	50	50	11%
Owa-Oyibu	50	42	9%
Agbor	50	50	11%
Aboh	50	50	11%
Kwale	50	50	11%
Okwe	50	40	9%
Akwukwu-Igbo	50	46	10%
Umutu	50	50	11%
TOTAL	450	418	92%

A total of 450 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the respondents and 418(92%) copies were returned and found usable for the study. The response rate of 92% is considered appropriate for the study because the standard response rate for most studies is 60% (Dulle, Minish-Majanja & Cloete, 2010).

Section A: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Gender Distribution of the Respondents

Table 2: Gender of the Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	240	57%
Female	178	43%
Total	418	100%

From **Table 2**, it is evident that 240(57%) of the respondents were male, while 178(43%) of the respondents were female.

Occupation Distribution of the Respondents

Table 3: Occupation of the Respondents

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Farming	145	35%
Fishing	108	26%
Trading	72	17%
Business	47	11%
Palm Oil Processing	34	8%
Professional/ White Collar Jobs	12	3%
Total	418	100%

Table 3 revealed that 145(35%) of the respondents engage in Farming, 108(26%) of the respondents engaged in Fishing, 72(17%) of the respondents engage in Trading, 47(11%) of the respondents engage in Business, 34(8%) of the respondents engage in Palm Oil Processing, and 12(3%) of the respondents engage in Professional/ White Collar Jobs.

Section B: Analysis of the key findings of the study

Find out the COVID-19 information needs of rural dwellers in Delta North, Nigeria.

Table 4: COVID-19 information needs of rural dwellers in Delta North

COVID-19 information needs of rural dwellers in Delta North	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Information on COVID-19 Spread in Nigeria	256(62%)	64(15%)	14(3%)	84(20%)	418 (100%)
Information on COVID-19 Prevention	312(75%)	84(20%)	12(3%)	10(2%)	418 (100%)
General COVID-19 Emerging News	328(79%)	52(12%)	24(6%)	14(3%)	418 (100%)
Information on measure to curb the spread of the Disease	284(68%)	42(10%)	62(15%)	30(7%)	418 (100%)
Information on government policies on COVID-19	305(73%)	64(15%)	28(7%)	21(5%)	418 (100%)
Information on symptoms of COVID-19	272(65%)	58(14%)	72(17%)	16(4%)	418 (100%)
Information on ways of seeking medical help in the pandemic era	308(74%)	56(13%)	38(9%)	16(4%)	418 (100%)
Information on Orthodox or Herbal Treatment for COVID-19	242(58%)	98(23%)	20(5%)	58(14%)	418 (100%)
Information on progress in the COVID-19 Vaccine Experimentation	108(26%)	48(11%)	34(8%)	228(55%)	418 (100%)
Information on Statistics of active cases, discharged cases as well as Fatalities brought about by COVID-19	202(48.3%)	68(16.3%)	34(8.1%)	114(27.3%)	418 (100%)
Information on suitable diet to boost immune system	98(24%)	104(25%)	14(3%)	202(48%)	418 (100%)

It is evident from the findings that the rural dwellers in Delta North, Nigeria have some COVID-19 information needs. From the results in Table 4, it was revealed that the COVID-19 information needs of the rural dwellers were on general emerging news on COVID-19, COVID-19 prevention, ways of seeking medical help in the pandemic era, government policies on COVID-19, measures to curb the spread of the disease, symptoms of COVID-19, COVID-19 spread in Nigeria, Orthodox or Herbal Treatment for COVID-19, Statistics of active cases, discharged cases, as well as Fatalities, brought about by COVID-19, progress in the COVID-19 Vaccine Experimentation and suitable diet to boost the immune system.

Ascertain the preferred information sources on COVID-19 by the rural dwellers

Table 5: Preferred information sources on COVID-19 by the Rural Dwellers

Preferred Information Sources on COVID-19	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Books (Both Print and Electronic)	224(54%)	48(11%)	32(8%)	114(27%)
Journals	44(11%)	72(17%)	88(21%)	214(51%)
Audio Visuals	51(12%)	68(16%)	115(28%)	184(44%)
Family Members/ Friends	384(92%)	24(6%)	4(1%)	6(1%)
Mass Media (Television, Radio, Newspapers, etc.)	364(87%)	38(9%)	12(3%)	4(1%)
Healthcare Provider/ Physicians	312(75%)	86(20%)	12(3%)	8(2%)
Online Webpages/ Blogs	38(9%)	74(18%)	138(33%)	168(40%)
Government Accredited Health Agency Platforms (Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, Ministry of Health, etc.)	72(17%)	38(9%)	86(21%)	222(53%)
Herbal Doctors/ Traditional Healers	344(82%)	46(11%)	16(4%)	12(3%)
Herb Hawkers	248(59%)	86(21%)	72(17%)	12(3%)
Pharmacist/ Chemist	246(59%)	26(6%)	34(8%)	112(27%)
Town Criers	302(72%)	64(15%)	24(6%)	28(7%)
Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)	224(54%)	68(16%)	44(10%)	82(20%)

The findings have made clear the preferred information sources on COVID-19 by the rural dwellers. It is evident in Table 5 that the preferred information source on COVID-19 by the rural dwellers are family members/ friends, mass media (Television, Radio, Newspapers, etc.), herbal doctors/ traditional healers, healthcare providers/ physicians, town criers, herb hawkers, pharmacist/ chemist, NGOs, books (print/ electronic), government accredited health agency platforms, audio-visuals, journals, and online webpages/ blogs.

Establish the use of COVID-19 information by rural dwellers

Table 6: The Use of COVID-19 Information by Rural Dwellers

Use of COVID-19 Information by the Rural Dwellers	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
To take quality health decisions	286(68%)	26(6%)	20(5%)	86(21%)
To educate family members/ friends about current news on COVID-19	368(88%)	20(5%)	18(4%)	12(3%)
To stop the spread of COVID-19 by observing precautionary measures	362(87%)	22(5%)	26(6%)	8(2%)
To keep a safe distance from persons that show symptoms of COVID-19	242(58%)	28(7%)	46(11%)	102(24%)
To abide by government policies on COVID-19	322(77%)	36(9%)	22(5%)	38(9%)
To know the progress of the COVID-19 vaccines experimentation	74(18%)	44(11%)	62(15%)	238(57%)
To understand how to seek medical help in the pandemic era	312(75%)	52(12%)	44(11%)	10(2%)
To educate my kinsmen on preventive measures from the COVID-19 disease	302(72%)	42(10%)	66(16%)	8(2%)
To call help lines to report suspected cases of COVID-19	64(15%)	22(5%)	65(16%)	267(64%)
To keep abreast on current statistics on active cases, discharged cases, as well as fatalities, brought about by COVID-19	214(51%)	128(31%)	22(5%)	54(13%)

The rural dwellers use the COVID-19 information they seek to meet their various information needs. Table 6 revealed that the rural dwellers use COVID-19 information to educate family members/ friends about current news on COVID-19, stop the spread of COVID-19 by observing precautionary measures, abide by government policies on COVID-19, seek medical help in the pandemic era, understand how to seek medical help in the pandemic era, educate my kinsmen on preventive measures from the COVID-19 disease, take quality health decisions, keep a safe distance from persons that show symptoms of COVID-19, keep abreast on current statistics on active cases, discharged cases as well as fatalities brought about by COVID-19, know the progress of the COVID-19 vaccines experimentation and call helplines to report suspected cases of COVID-19.

Determine the challenges that militate against the access and use of COVID-19 information by rural dwellers

Table 7: The challenges that militate against the access and use of COVID-19 information

Challenges that militates against the access and use of COVID-19 information	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Too many fake news about COVID-19	392(94%)	5(1%)	12(3%)	9(2%)
Non-availability of relevant information on COVID-19	334(79.9%)	68(16.3%)	6(1.4%)	10(2.4%)
Too many Contradicting information on COVID-19	376(90%)	22(5%)	8(2%)	12(3%)
Communication/ Language barriers	286(68.4%)	64(15.3%)	22(5.3%)	46(11%)
High level of illiteracy	98(23%)	78(19%)	168(40%)	74(18%)
Insufficient power supply to charge phones and watch television	226(54%)	86(21%)	68(16%)	38(9%)
High cost of Data Subscription	218(52%)	46(11%)	86(21%)	68(16%)
Information Overloads on COVID-19 pandemic	242(58%)	64(15%)	84(20%)	28(7%)
Government Policies on COVID-19 are not adequately publicised	248(59%)	74(18%)	68(16%)	28(7%)
Information on COVID-19 are very Cumbersome	144(34%)	82(20%)	162(39%)	30(7%)
Keeping abreast of statistics on COVID-19 is very difficult since it changes daily	202(48.3%)	114(27.3%)	76(18.2%)	26(6.2%)

In spite of the enormous literature on the COVID-19 pandemic, there is exist some challenges that militate against the access and use of COVID-19 information by people in rural areas. It is glaring from Table 7 that the challenges that militate against the use of COVID-19 information by the rural dwellers are too many fake news about COVID-19, too many Contradicting information on COVID-19, non-availability of relevant information on COVID-19, communication/ Language barriers, government policies on COVID-19 are not adequately publicised, information overloads on COVID-19 pandemic, insufficient power supply to charge phones and watch television, high cost of Data Subscription, keeping abreast of statistics on COVID-19 is very difficult since it changes daily, information on COVID-19 are very Cumbersome, and high level of Illiteracy.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The study was carried out to explore the COVID-19 information seeking strategies of rural dwellers in Delta North, Nigeria. The study recorded a response rate of 92% which was considered adequate for the study. The data from the study shows that there were more male respondents than females in the study. The study also revealed that the majority of the respondents engage in farming, this is followed by fishing, trading, business, palm oil processing, and professional / white-collar jobs.

COVID-19 information needs of rural dwellers in Delta North, Nigeria

The finding indicates clearly that the COVID-19 information needs of rural dwellers are general emerging news on COVID-19, COVID-19 prevention, ways of seeking medical help in the pandemic era, government policies on COVID-19, measures to curb the spread of the disease, symptoms of COVID-19, COVID-19 spread in Nigeria, Orthodox or Herbal Treatment for COVID-19, Statistics of active cases, discharged cases as well as Fatalities brought about by COVID-19, among others. This finding agrees with the study of Statista (2020) which revealed that the respondents require information on policies on COVID-19, the risk to the health, symptoms, and COVID-19 information in general. This finding disagrees with the study of Adeyoyin and Oyewusi (2015) which revealed that the majority of the respondents indicated nutrition as their major health information need.

Preferred information sources on COVID-19 by the Rural Dwellers

The findings revealed that the preferred information sources in COVID-19 by the respondents are family members/ friends, mass media (Television, Radio, Newspapers, etc.), herbal doctors/ traditional healers, healthcare providers/ physicians, town criers, herb hawkers, pharmacist/ chemist, NGOs, books (print/ electronic), government accredited health agency platforms, audio-visuals, and journals, among others. This findings agree with the study of Sokey and Adisah-Atta (2017) which revealed that the majority of the respondents indicated their preferred health information was family members, followed by the healthcare provider. The findings also concur with the study of Nwagwu and Ajama (2011) which revealed that respondents rely mainly on herbs hawkers, family members/ friends, and traditional healers for their health information needs.

The Use of COVID-19 Information by Rural Dwellers

The findings indicate clearly that the rural dwellers use COVID-19 information to educate family members/ friends about current news on COVID-19, stop the spread of COVID-19 by observing precautionary measures, abide by government policies on COVID-19, seek medical help in the pandemic era, understand how to seek medical help in the pandemic era, educate my kinsmen on preventive measures from the COVID-19 disease, take quality health decisions, keep a safe distance from persons that show symptoms of COVID-19, keep abreast on current statistics on active cases, discharged cases, as well as fatalities, brought about by COVID-19, among others. The findings agree with the affirmation of Chen, Orom, Hay, Waters, Schofield, Li, and Kiviniemi (2019) which posit that people use health information (COVID-19 Information) to make decisions that maintain/ improve their health.

The Challenges that militates against the use of COVID-19 information

In spite of the vast amount of literature on COVID-19, there persists a lot of challenges that militate the rural dwellers from using them. It is clear from the findings that the challenges that militate against the use of COVID-19 information by the rural dwellers are too many fake news about COVID-19, too many Contradicting information on COVID-19, non-availability of relevant information on COVID-19, communication/ Language barriers, government policies on COVID-19 are not adequately publicised, information overloads on COVID-19 pandemic, insufficient power supply to charge phones and watch television, high cost of Data Subscription, keeping abreast of statistics on COVID-19 is very difficult since it changes daily, among others. This finding agrees with the issue raised by Vanderslott (2020) that fake news about COVID-19 makes it difficult for people to identify which sources are real and trusted. The findings also agree with the study of Murugathas, Sritharan, and Santharooban (2020) which identified non-availability of relevant information and language barriers as the militating factors towards the use of health related information.

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic as a global health crisis has affected the information seeking strategies of rural dwellers in Nigeria. The rural dwellers in Delta North, Nigeria have some gaps that prompt them to seek information on the COVID-19 disease. The rural dwellers seek COVID-19 information mainly to get general emerging news on COVID-19, COVID-19 prevention, ways of seeking medical help in the pandemic era, government policies on COVID-19, and measures to curb the spread of the disease. In spite of the wide range of information sources on COVID-19, the rural dwellers prefer to seek COVID-19 information from family members/ friends, mass media (Television, Radio, Newspapers, etc.), herbal doctors/ traditional healers, healthcare providers/ physicians, town criers, herb hawkers, pharmacist/ chemist, NGOs, books (print/ electronic), and government accredited health agency platforms. The information obtained is used to educate family members/ friends about current news on COVID-19, stop the spread of COVID-19 by observing precautionary measures, abide by government policies on COVID-19, seek medical help in the pandemic era, understand how to seek medical help in the pandemic era, educate my kinsmen on preventive measures from the COVID-19 disease, take quality health decisions, among others. The challenges that militate against the access and use of COVID-19 information by the rural dwellers are mainly too many fake news about COVID-19, too many Contradicting information on COVID-19, non-availability of relevant information on COVID-19, communication/ Language barriers, government policies on COVID-19 are not adequately publicised, and information overloads on COVID-19 pandemic. This study has made clear the information needs, preferred information sources, and the challenges that militate against the access and use of COVID information by the rural dwellers in Delta North, Nigeria. The government through this study would know the channels to pass relevant information COVID-19 that will reach the people as well as mitigate some of the challenges that affect the access and use of COVID-information by the rural dwellers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made in line with the findings of the study:

1. Journals and audio-visual materials on COVID-19 should be published in the local dialect of the rural dwellers to encourage them to consult them for their COVID-19/ health information needs.
2. Government accredited health agency platforms should publish COVID-19 information in both English and the local dialect of the rural people to ensure the information penetrate more in society.
3. The rural dwellers should endeavour to use the COVID-19 information they obtain meaningful to stay safe and healthy.
4. Researchers/ scholars and writers should desist from publishing fake and other irrelevant information on COVID-19, this will reduce the amount of fake news in the public domain on COVID-19 disease.
5. Government extension workers and other NGOs that pass COVID-19 information to the rural people should ensure they move with interpreters proficient in the local dialect of the people to meet the communication/ language barriers.
6. Town criers should be employed to pass new information/ government policies on COVID-19 to the rural people to boost their awareness.
7. The government should improve power supply to rural areas as this will enable them to have an energy source to power their digital devices and watch television programmes that could enhance their awareness on COVID-19.

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