Impact of Social Support on Mental Wellbeing among Internet Users In Nigeria During Covid-19 Pandemic

Emmanuel Sochukwuma Ezaka[1], Asiegbu Martin F[2], Okoli Paul Chibuike[3], Okpara Titus Chukwubuzo[3], Chime Peter Ekpunobi[3], Ozougwu Augustine Obumneme[3], Ofojebe Chukwuma Philip[4], Okoli Alexander Chinwike[4]

[1]Department of Psychology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu-Nigeria

[2]Department of Philosophy, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu-Nigeria

[3]Department of Internal Medicine, College of Medicine, Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu- Nigeria

[4]Department of Psychology, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka-Nigeria

*Correspondence

Okoli Paul Chibuike

Department of Internal Medicine, College of Medicine, Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu- Nigeria

Abstract

This study investigated the role of social support on mental wellbeing during COVID-19 Pandemic among internet users in Nigeria. A total of one hundred and six (106) participants (55 (51.9%) females, and 51 (48.9%) males participated in the study. The participant ages ranged from 19-29 years with a mean age of 28.68 and standard deviation of 8.14. Participants were drawn using convenience sampling technique and data were collated using the online Google form method. The link to the survey was shared across different platforms such: as Facebook, Whatsapp, and email list. The participants gave their consent and willingness to participate by checking a box in the online survey. Two instruments were used in data collection namely; a 15-item COVID-19 social support questionnaire (COVID-19-SSQ) and Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (AWEMWBS). Two hypotheses were tested. The study adopted cross sectional design, while regression was employed for data analysis. The findings indicate that the presence of social support has significant influence on existence of mental wellbeing. It is recommended that social support factor should be sustained because of its buffer effect on mental wellbeing during COVID-19 Pandemic among internet users in Nigeria.

Objective

Background to the study

The year 2020 came with the COVID-19 outbreak which is a global emergency that the world will remember for years and talk about for centuries to come. The Corona Virus disease of 2019 (COVID-19) threw the word into a ruinous state as its wave affected all spheres of human existence. According to World Health Organization [1], the Corona Viruses are group of viruses that infect humans, birds, and mammals. They account for several outbreaks across the globe including the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) of 2002-2003 and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) which took place in South Korea in 2015 [2]. The virus which affects the respiratory tract can be transmitted through person-to-person contact when a carrier coughs or sneezes, the droplets are released into the air or having a one-on-one contact through handshakes, hugging or kissing. Some of the general symptoms of the dreaded virus include; cold or flu which starts after 2-4 days after infection, sneezing, cough, runny nose, watery diarrhea, sore throat, fever in rare cases, and/or exacerbated asthma

[2]. Specifically, these symptoms vary from person-to-person, while according to National Institute of Health [2], individuals who are at risk of developing Covid-19 complications include; young children, adults above 65 years and pregnant women, this group of people are conditionally having low immune system, therefore, the virus subject them to experience more complications than the rest.

COVID-19 outbreak which started in Wuhan, China in December 2019 was on the 11th March 2020 declared a pandemic by the WHO [3]. It is a pandemic that the world will remember for years and talk about for centuries to come. The countries with the worst hit includes; the United States of America, Spain, Italy, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, China, Iran, Turkey, Belgium, the Russian Federation, Canada and Brazil [3] Interestingly, Africa so far has recorded lowest prevalence rate when compared with other continents, this is parallel to the earlier prediction made that Africa will experience the major impact of COVID-19 [4]. In February 2020, Africa reported her first case of the virus in Egypt, while the western part of Africa recorded the first case in Nigeria through an Italian national

who flew into the country from Italy [5,6]. One year after the index case was reported in Africa, the continent had recorded cumulative cases of 2,797, 952, death toll of 102, 797, recovery of 62, 398, 315, and out of these figures, South Africa, Ethiopia, and Zambia, maintain the first, second, and third countries respectively with highest prevalence, while Nigeria is the sixth [5].

Survival during a crisis is often made possible by the help people render to each other in midst of adversity. Social support (SOS) is crucial for human survival as it bridges the gap and gives people hope that they are not alone when dealing with ugly situations. SOS can be described as having a clearer understanding that people really care and support us, which may come from friends, family, colleagues, etc. The concept according to Paykani et al., [7] is the availability of reliable people who show us care, value and love. SOS connotes both perceived and received supports that help in personal wellbeing and resistance to health problems [8]. The perceived social support stands for subjective assessment of the existence and sufficiency of the support as provided by the social network, while received social support is the objective assessment of social connections and their subsequent functions [9]. Different researchers suggest that the connection between perceived social support and received social support is seemly high when the support requested is equivalent to the level of support provided [10]. A recent study suggests that perceived social support positively predicts wellbeing among young people [11]. It is worthy to note that during COVID-19, the need for the provision of social support was high in demand, but, the level at which it was sought and provided is yet unclear, therefore, this article seeks to understand the level of social support that existed and how it buffered mental health status of the Nigerians during the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, having good mental health in all situations helps individuals overcome both emotional and physical pain. The COVID-19 protocols generated emotional reactions as they restricted people from social gatherings, economic activities, and even though the lockdown, quarantine, or social isolation produced great results in preventing the spread of the pandemic, it affected the psychological aspect of human life across the globe. The public suffered different degrees of fear ranging from the original fear of the existence of the virus with no cure, fear of contracting the virus, fear of being isolated, fear of death, and also fear of stigma should one survive it. All of this generated anxiety and depression which can adversely affect one's quality of life. Similarly, Bao Y, et al. [12] suggest that outbreaks of infectious diseases like COVID-19 have a strong link with psychological distress and symptoms of mental illness. This implies that as the world is searching for an end to the pandemic, attention should be given to the area of mental wellness of the general populace in order to reduce in future the prevalence of mental illness caused by COVID-19. There are existing literature that address the impact of COVID-19 on socioeconomic activities [13-16], socio-medical response [17], and medium of transmission and prevention [18], but little is known about the level of tangible and intangible support individuals received from family, friends, colleagues and significant other during COVID-19 and how the dreaded pandemic influenced mental health of Nigerian population. Therefore, this study aims to;

1. Understand the level and pattern of social support among Nigerians during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Examine the level of COVID-19 impact on mental health among Nigerians during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. Determine the level at which social support buffered mental health status of Nigerians during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Method

Participants

A total of one hundred and six (106) participants (25; 23.6% males and 78; 73.6% females) participated in the study. The selection of participants was through online means of data collation due to the COVID-19 protocols of social distancing. The online survey was shared across different platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and email list, with the help of research assistants. The ages of the participants were between 19-29 years with a Mean age of 28.68 and Std. Deviation of 8.14..

Instruments

To effectively carry out this study the following instruments were used: Covid-19 Social Support Questionnaire (COVID-19-SSQ) and The Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (SAWEMWBS). The COVID-19 social support questionnaire (COVID-19-SSQ) is a 15-item questionnaire developed by researchers. It was used to assess the knowledge of COVID-19 and the level of social support received during the COVID-19 pandemic from the government, family, and friends. Some of the items in the questionnaire include "Covid-19 can be spread from person to person?" "Family members have been there for me during Covid-19" "I can count on the government in terms of Covid-19 emergency" "The government has been supportive in providing palliatives" The 15-item with likert type response format was worded from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree with internal reliability of 0.73 and Cronbach α of 0.89.

The short Warwick-Edinburgh mental well-being scale (SAWEMWBS) was developed to assess level of mental wellbeing in the general population with the intention to improve mental wellbeing. The SAWEMWBS is a 7-item questionnaire against the full version of 14-item. The 7-item SAWEMWBS targets the mental functionality which is positively worded with Likert type response format from 1=None of the time, 2=Rarely, 3=Some of the time, 4=Often, and 5=All of the time. While the internal reliability yielded 0.83.

Procedure

The selection of participant was through availability sampling technique. The participants gave their consent and willingness to participate by checking a box in the online survey. The recruitment duration lasted from mid-August 2020 to January 2021. The demographic variable included were age, gender, marital status, occupation, level of education, and state of residence. Overall, 55 (51.9%) were females, and 51 (48.9%) were males. The ages of the participants were between 19-29 years with a Mean age of 29.68 and Std. Deviation of 8.14. The participants were internet users from across 22 states of Nigeria including federal capital territory. The inclusion criteria were internet users across Nigeria, aged 18 years and above while the exclusion criteria were Nigerians who do not have access to the internet and younger than 18 years.

Table I: *The summary table of descriptive statistics on the mean difference between Psychological wellbeing and Social Support.*

s/n	Variables	M	SD	1	2
1.	Psychological wellbeing	25.60	4.57	1.	
2.	Social support	52.31	7.45	411**	1

** = p< .001, M = Mean, SD = standard deviation

Table II: *The summary table of means of social support and psychological wellbeing.*

1	Social support	.252	.411	4.600	.000
	R				.411
	R2				.169
	Adjusted R2				.161
	F-Change				21.16
	Sig. F-Change				.000

Dependent variable= Psychological wellbeing, at p< .001

Design and statistics

The study adopted the cross-sectional design for the online study using Google form software and was adopted for data analysis.

Results

Table I above indicated that psychological wellbeing significantly correlated with social support, which means the presence of social support can bring about the presence of psychological wellbeing.

Table II above implies that both variables are significantly correlated, which means that the presence of social support can bring about the presence of psychological wellbeing among people during covid-19 at r= .4, social support contributed 17% variance to psychological wellbeing at r2= .169, value of 16% shows misfit at adjusted r2= .161. Social support was able to predict psychological wellbeing because the value of sig= .000 is below the threshold of at p< .001.

Discussion

Several factors may be influencing internet users in Nigeria mental health. During our study, the COVID-19 epidemic has continued to spread worldwide. Probable COVID-19 incident, like many infectious diseases, may increase internet users in Nigeria fear of illness and death. The findings in this study showed that the presence of social support can bring about the presence of psychological wellbeing among people during COVID-19. The findings in this study agrees with those of previous studies by Xiao H, et al. [19] and Jacobson NC, et al. [20] in which it was observed that social support is related to people's mental health. Social support can help relieve or buffer the anxiety symptoms of individuals in the face of stress, thus reducing the symptoms of insomnia.

In their studies, Guntzviller LM, et al. [21] and Simons HR, et al. [22] found that levels of social support are closely related to incidence of depression and anxiety, that low levels of social support are more likely to lead to depression and anxiety symptoms when individuals are exposed to stress, and that social support can be a valuable predictor of mental health status.

Jacobson NC et al. [20]. Similarly, Glozah [23] observed that social support also improves an individual's sense of self-efficacy and leads to more understanding, respect, encouragement, courage, and self fulfillment, all of which can help an individual maintain relatively stable emotions even under pressure.

Limitations of the study

There are some limitations to the present study. The first is that the study was limited to internet users in Nigeria young adults between ages 19-29 these may impact sample representativeness. Second, this study uses self-report measures through online means of data collation due to the COVID-19 protocols of social distancing. Finally, this is a cross-sectional survey, limiting our ability to make affirmative statements about causal relationships. It is necessary to conduct further prospective and longitudinal studies to assess the levels of mental health and social support at different points in the future within the context of COVID-19.

Conclusion

This study investigated the role of social support on mental wellbeing during COVID-19 Pandemic among internet users in Nigeria. The findings indicate that the presence of social support has a significant influence on existence of mental wellbeing. The findings provide evidence supporting the implementation of strategies to explore other factors other enhances social support for young adult's internet users in Nigeria during the COVID-19 epidemic. Again, psychologists and social workers should develop program to provide psychological first aids and individually as part of social support targeting interventions to promote mental wellbeing among Nigeria young adult internet users. Efforts should also be made to encourage the availability of other mental well-being enhancers along with social support to promote mental health among young adult Nigeria internet users who are experiencing the impact of COVID-19 outbreak.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately affected their report of the findings of this research.

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