Traditional Institutions and Health Advocacy on Covid 19 in South East Senatorial District, Rivers State.

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This study evaluates traditional institutions and health advocacy on covid-19 in South-East Senatorial District,. To achieve this, the study raised six objectives, to: ascertain the level of covid-19 advocacy and awareness among indigenes in South-East Senatorial District, ascertain the covid-19 risk behaviour and reinforcing factors among the indigenes in South-East Senatorial District, determine the activities undertaken by traditional institutions on covid-19 advocacy and awareness in the South-East Senatorial District, determine the communication strategies used by traditional institutions on covid-19 and health advocacy in the South-East Senatorial District. The study also had 3 hypotheses and two theories; Diffusion of Innovations theory and the Democratic Participant theory. With survey as research design, the questionnaire and interview guide were used as data-gathering instruments. The population of the study was 536,900 residents of the study area while the sample size of 384 was drawn using Stacks Hockings (1992). Data obtained from the research instruments were analysed using Weighted Mean score (WMS) and a four point- Likert scale. The findings of the study reveal as follows: the level of advocacy and awareness on Covid-19 in the South East Senatorial District was high; indigenes of the Senatorial District, did not engage in regular hand washing with running water and soap because most of them did not believe that the pandemic was real; traditional institutions in the Senatorial District used traditional rulers, age grades and other community group meetings as major communication strategies to drive advocacy on the pandemic.

The study recommended as follows. The government and health regulatory agencies should consider traditional institutions as an integral part of the health advocacy, especially in rural Communities; the government should improve on the provision of health amenities in the communities; traditional communication media should be deliberately engaged to create health awareness in the District and the dialect of the people should be used in transmission of health messages especially in times of pandemics such as Covid-19.

Background to the Study

The Covid-19 pandemic constitutes one of the most profound and complex challenges facing development with negative impacts on health as well as social and economic progress. Globally, there are about 17. 5 million cases reported with about 677.454 deaths recorded as at 30th July, 2020, while sub-Saharan Africa has been identified as the hotbed' of the next wave of the pandemic. This pandemic can be likened to the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) epidemic that hit some countries like Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone and was classified by the United Nations as the longest, largest, deadliest, and the most complex and challenging Ebola outbreak in history. What started as a public health crisis in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China and was reported to the World Health Organisation on December 31, 2019 was declared a global health emergency on January 30, 2020. Furtherance to this, the World Health Organisation 'WHO' declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, its first such designation since declaring HINI influenza a pandemic in 2009 on March 11, 2020.

On the other hand, some Nigerians due to superstitions and ignorance of the science behind the infection prefer only to pray (even violating the social distancing rule by attending churches or mosques during the lockdown) and use anointing oils, talisman, herbs or ritual to prevent contracting and spreading the virus. Some also use social media platforms (e.g. Whatshapp, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram) to spread fear, project fake news concerning the source of the virus, promote prejudice against China, incite panic buying, proffer fake cures and undermine medical advice, deliberately or ignorantly. They opined that lockdown, self-isolation and social distancing are un-African solutions to the pandemic. Given the importance of knowledge of precautionary activities in curbing the spread of infectious diseases such as the novel COVID-19, it is

important to research on people's health knowledge at this period of the pandemic.

The traditional institution as one of the oldest institutions that have been part of the Rivers State governing system dated back to the pre-colonial era. The institution and the personalities involved are well-known and revered by the communities and by extension the government. In the past and even in the present, they played a huge role in the nation's governance, not excluding the health advocacy, through their well constituted traditional laws and customs, over time, they have become a force to reckon and a channel for grass root mobilization campaign, maintenance of laws and order, and other social integration and activities, (Zep-obipi, 2015).

According to Holness and Rule, 2014 in (Okon, 2021). The concept of advocacy could be seen as the process of making people aware of their rights to equality and the available mechanisms that would ensure that they receive due respects, rights and privileges against any form of denial, prejudice of discrimination. It refers to efforts put in place with the intention of changing public perception, influence policy decision and priorities. It is feared towards making a case in support of a given issue (Dzisah, 2019).

Media advocacy attempts to use different available media platforms, from physical conversations to mediated means, in concert with human resources to inform, enlighten, influence, and change the course of actions and behaviours for public good. Given attention to elements involved in media advocacy is therefore and imperative for development.

Drawing from this premise, Staples (2009), notes that "media advocacy is the act of strategically mobilizing community interest in a problem and its solutions" (p. 175). It follows a series of orchestrated events. First, the issue appears topical and is perceived as important by some opinion leaders in the community. Second, a language develops around the problem including common knowledge about the cause of the problem and what change or policy is likely to address the problem. Third, decision makers are educated and people at the grassroots are urged to

speak up and ask for a change from the decision makers. This no doubt involves some form of social mobilization.

According to Wallack, et al (1993), "advocacy in an innovative and sophisticated way of critically using the media to promote change because the mass media have become a powerful force in our society" (p.2). In this regard, media advocacy can be a significant force for influencing public debate and putting pressure on policy makers by increasing the volume of social voice and in turn by increasing visibility of values and issues behind the voice.
Media advocacy requires the identification of an issue and an accompanying initiative to address that issue. An issue is a burning concern that drives an initiative. Whether it is a problem or vision statement, an issue defines the boundaries from which an initiative is shaped. The initiative could be instituted by an organization or a coalition.

Statement of the Problem

The outbreak of corona-virus /Covid-19 pandemic created a global health crisis that had very deep impact on the way people perceive the world and daily lives. Hence, community awareness of the risk factors for corona-virus infection and the protective measures individuals could take is of paramount importance. The traditional rulers, government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other agencies carried out Covid-19 sensitisation and awareness including putting messages and jingles/ commercials on radio and television respectively. Posters were also posted around communities as part of a long term programmes to inform the public as well as to help prevent further spread of infections especially in South-East Senatorial District of Rivers State. Other measures included, organising seminars and workshops on corona virus related topic, as well as taking to the street and villages to educate the public on how to respond to the outbreak.

A significant number of studies on the Covid-19 pandemic have been carried out but none has centered on traditional institutions and Covid-19 advocacy and awareness, especially in a region that attracted and contained most of the foreign and local industrial activities in the state. Unarguably, the role of traditional institutions is significant for mobilisation and advocacy being the closest

institutions to the peoples, customs and traditions. Based on this therefore, this study set out to examine the Traditional Institutions and Health Advocacy on Covid - 19 in South East Senatorial District, Rivers State.

Objectives

The study was to analyse the role of Traditional Institutions in health advocacy on covid–19 in the South East Senatorial District, Rivers State. The specific objectives are:

1. To ascertain the level of Covid-19 advocacy and awareness among indigenes in South East Senatorial District, Rivers State
2. Ascertain the Covid-19 risk behaviour and reinforcing factors among the indigenes in South-East Senatorial District, Rivers State
3. Determine the activities undertaken by traditional institutions on covid – 19 health advocacy and awareness in the South East Senatorial District, Rivers State?
4. Determine the communication strategies used by traditional institutions on covid-19 and health advocacy in the South East Senatorial District, Rivers State
5. Identify the challenges and barriers of health advocacy on Covid-19 by traditional institutions in South-East Senatorial District, Rivers State?
6. Assess the influence of health advocacy and preventive strategies on covid – 19 by traditional institutions on the people of South East Senatorial District, Rivers State

Review of Literature

Theoretical Framework

In explaining the topic under examination, the researcher adopted two theories; these are diffusion of innovation theory and the advocacy coalition framework. The justification for using these theories are based on their relevancy and connectivity, they all centered on the civic responsibilities of a quality leadership and leadership autonomy in the society. The theories are of the opinions that traditional rulers should be allowed to discharge the traditional and constitutional obligations as enshrined in the traditions and customs of the people, as an independent body, honest, truthfulness, loyal, accountable, forecast, and prudent in all their administrative affairs, our locality look up to them for direction.

Diffusion of innovation theory

This theory was propounded in 1962 by Everett Rogers. According to this theory, "diffusion is the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system". Classified under cultural theories, Nwachukwu, Asak and Asadu (2013) assert that "diffusion research centers on the conditions which increase or decrease the likelihood that a new idea or product will be adopted by members of a given culture". The Oxford Advanced Learners English Dictionary explained the word diffuse as "to spread over a wide area" (p.93).

In trying to throw more light to this theory, Okwechime (2016) states that the diffusion of innovation theory "explains how innovations are introduced and adapted by various communities" (p.233-4).That "the diffusion of an innovation invariably occurs when an idea spreads from a point of origin to surrounding geographic areas or from person to person within a single area''.

Diffusion deals with special information whose underlying interpretation is idea-based. From the foregoing, in the first definition, for an idea to be accepted by a people, which Rogers called a social system, such idea must be communicated. Communication here deals with the process through which those involved design and disseminate information with others. Through communication, "new ideas, technologies, innovations and practices" receive better explanations and decisions to adopt or reject such is then made by the people, (Asadu, 2012).

According to Ihejirika and Mbazie (2007) , diffusion of innovation is "the process of spreading any kind of new technical device, idea or useful information". Every idea must pass through a process- the communication process - before it can reach the intended target. However, there are certain channels which every communication must pass through in order to be accomplished. The traditional communication channels are not left behind in the communication process. (Rogers,1983), states that "a communication channel is a means by which messages get from one individual to another" (p.11). For individuals to be able to share messages and information, there must be homophily. Homophily refers to the extent to which two persons are alike in some attributes. "Generally, most human

communication takes place between individuals who are homophilous", (Rogers, 2003, p. 11).

The time taken by individuals to consider acceptance or rejection and a better understanding of a message is an important aspect of the theory. Comparing this to time taken by members of a community to deliberate on certain development issues is a pointer to the relevance of this theory to this work. The time element is accorded importance in this theory as (Rogers, 1983) states that "the innovation-decision period is the length of time required to pass through the innovation-decision process"

The term "social system" as defined in this theory includes communities, localities, audience and their interrelated units". Within this system, each individual is guided by norms, beliefs and layed down cultures. The social system found within a geographical area "facilitates or impedes the diffusion of innovations" Rogers (1983, p.12). Established norms, cultures and traditions of the South East Senatorial District are adhered to by every indigene (and non-indigenes) of the LGA. This eases the effort put into communicating new development to the people.

Communication of certain awareness on health hazards in the Local Government in the South East Senatorial District passes through recognized channels of communication. Opinion leaders are found in every community and they wield considerable influence on the people and therefore speed up the communication process for development. New ideas, innovations and developments must be communicated to the people in order to create awareness of such to the people. The theory of diffusion of innovation is relevant to this study since it deals with ideas (geared towards health management and control), innovations, communication channels, social system (the people) and recognition of the cultural values, norms, customs and other traditional practices of a people. These are all related to the area of traditional channels of communication awareness and advocacy of in the Local Government Areas of South East Senatorial District.

The Democratic Participant Theory

The Democratic Participant Media Theory underpins this study. McQuail (2010) described democratic participant media as small - scale , formed by groups ,

organizations and local communities as interactive and participative in contrast to large - scale, one way professionalized media . McQuail (2010) viewed it as an extension of the normative theories beyond the initial four postulations of Seibert *et al* from 1956. This theory is a modification of the social responsibility theory and it proposed that the media should propagate, support and promote the views and opinions of individuals in respect of governance, leadership and stewardship of leaders in public governance. The theory emphasizes the need for equal and unhindered access regardless of their status, wealth and position, therefore participation in societal decision making and involvement in communication activities should not be the exclusive preserve of the rich but of all citizens. The theory challenged the dominance of centralized media (McQuail 2010) and is perceived as a reaction to the commercialization and monopolization of the commercial media and the centralist and bureaucratization of public service media. Significantly, the theory advocates for citizens ownership of the media for community expression, dialogue and development. According to the tenets espoused by this theory, community ownership and participation is the distinguishing characteristic of community media.

McQuail's interpretation of the democratic participant media theory, therefore, serves as the basis for providing a rationale in the discourse of community radio broadcasting. For instance, using the Democratic Participant Media approach as a theoretical framework for his study, Lewis (2013) points to McQuail's earlier summary of the principles of the theory as directly related to community radio and democracy of the airwaves. Most of the principles highlighted in this theory can be used to describe the typical role such a phenomenon as community radio broadcasting could play in society. The normative framework published in McQuail (2010), serves to illustrate the points of variance between commercial, public service and participatory media, particularly in their underlining assumptions of participatory communication and democracy. It is pertinent to underscore the fact that McQuail's position in the theory seems to be referring to the centrifugal tendencies of the media which focus on diversity , plurality , change and so on (McQuail, 2010) . In the words of McQuail (1983, pp. 97 as cited in Al - Ahmed 1997, pp.18) the " individual citizen and monitoring groups have the right of access to the media, the right to communicate and the right to be served by the media according to their determination of needs; the organization and content of

media should not be subject to centralized political or state bureaucratic control ". Al Ahmed (1997, pp. 18-19) summarises that the main tenets of this theory are to achieve an effective participative democracy through information, giving people free access to the media, their wishes and needs a priority in media production, reduction in the increasing professionalism which dilutes the content of the messages and hinders an effective communication process with genuine feedback from taking place.

Democratic Participant media theory stipulates that small scale media (community radio), in contrast to mainstream media must be spearheaded by the active participation of members of the community and that the process of communication (radio) is decentralized to include community expression that leads to development and prevention of health hazard. This is also related to the basic stipulation contained in the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Code (2006).

The Democratic Participant Media theory though recognizing the possibilities of using small scale media such as community radio to ensure public participation has been criticized for failing to situate these media within the context of civil society. It has also been criticized for failing to recognize the challenges of the media situation in African countries where the media are structured in a way to be used primarily for development and creation of awareness (Atton, 2001). Further, this theory has been critiqued on the issue of deregulation of the media in small scales that might still be a privilege to the agenda of the dominant group. Another problem with the ideal structures of community radio as espoused in this theory is that it failed to recognize the inherent constraints of funding of such radio stations through collective effort and the fluid definition of the parameters of the community ownership (Atton 2001). However, the participatory element of community broadcasting which embodies its founding principles as also embedded in the theory is the ability to use volunteers drawn from the community in developing and administering policies and programmes, and also in producing and presenting programmes. The gender distribution and status of the volunteers employed generally demonstrate the extent the community media have gone in engendering popular participation of various members of the community.

Methodology

The study adopted a survey design to investigate Traditional Institutions and Health advocacy on Covid – 9 in the South East Senatorial District, Rivers State. The survey was carried out on the residents of Andoni and Opobo/ Nkoro constituencies of the South East Senatorial District, Rivers State. Survey design involves the study of a sample taken from a population. It was adopted because it was appropriate in eliciting information from a wide spectrum of society such as this study that relied on a very large extent of opinion, knowledge, behaviour an attitude. Above all, a survey design is suitable for the study because it is amenable to any subject that has large and small population.

The research population for this study comprises residents from the federal constituencies of Andoni and Opobo/Nkoro LGA made up of traditional rulers and their subjects and spread within the four clans of Andoni namely Unyeada, Ngo, Asarama, and Ataba area on one part, and Opobo/ Nkoro on the other part respectively. Relying on the 2006 National Population Census figures, the population of Andoni Local Government Area is 217,924 and at 2021 projected population increase of 2.5% per annum, the total population of Andoni is 315,553 while the Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area whose population as at 2006 is 152,833 and in 2021 projected population increase of 2.5% is estimated at 221,347. Cumulatively, the two constituencies are estimated at 536,900 which represent the total population of the study.

A total of 384 respondents formed the sample size for the study. This sample size was drawn using Stacks and Hockings (1992), population sampling template. Stacks and Hockings states that for any population of more than 500,000. 384 sample sizes are appropriate. Based on this, Stacks and Hockings propose a population template to assist researchers.

Data Collection and Analysis

The completed questionnaire and interview guide collected were analysed and presented in six tables using simple percentage.

Table 4.1 Analysis of Demographic Data

	Response Category	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Respondent Local Government Area	Andoni LGA	200	57
	Opobo/Nkoro LGA	150	43
	None of the above	Nil	0
	Total	350	100
	Gender	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Gender Distribution of Respondents	Male	200	57
	Female	150	43
	Total	350	100
	Age	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Age Distribution of Respondents	18-22	60	17
	23-26	90	26
	27-35	70	26
	36 and above	110	31
	Total	350	100
	Educational Background	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Educational Qualification of Respondents	FSLC	10	3
	O'Level/SSCE	40	11
	Higher Degree	200	57
	Others	100	29
	Total	350	100

Table 4.1 above indicates that more of the respondents were from Andoni Local Government Area which has larger population and spread. This implies that Andoni Local Government residents participated more in the study than the

Opobo/Nkoro Local Government area. Again the male gender participated higher than their female counterparts.

The table also shows that respondents within the age of 36 and above have the highest percentage of respondents followed by the respondents within the age of 23 to 26 and 27 to 35. The table finally shows that respondents with higher degree have the highest percentage of respondents followed by the others and O'Level/ SSCE

4.1.2 Research Questions

Research Question One; what is the level of Advocacy and awareness on Covid-19 among indigenes in South East Senatorial District, Rivers State?

Table 4.2: Level of Advocacy and Awareness about the Covid-19 among indigenes in South East Senatorial District, Rivers State

S/N	Item Description	SA	A	D	SD	Cumulative	Mean	Decision
1	The level of awareness about Covid-19 is high	800	300	60	20	1,180	3.37	Accept
2	The mode of transmission of Covid-19 is high	920	240	60	20	1,240	3.54	Accept
3.	Traditional rulers help in creating Covid-19 awareness	880	240	60	20	1,120	3.42	Accept
4	Traditional rulers health awareness and advocacy on Covid-19 is appropriate	920	240	60	20	1,240	3.54	Accept

Data in table 4.2 above shows that all the responses were accepted therefore indicating that the level of advocacy and awareness on Covid-19 among indigenes of the South-East Senatorial District, Rivers State

Research Question Two: what are the risk behaviour and reinforcing factors of Covid-19 among the indigenes in the South East Senatorial District?

Table 4.3: Risk behaviour and reinforcing factors of Covid-19 among the indigenes in the South East Senatorial District

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Cumulative	Mean	Decision
5	People in the area do not involve themselves in regular hand washing with running water and soap	800	300	60	20	1,180	3.37	Accept
6	People still involve themselves in crowd gathering	1000	210	40	10	1,260	3.6	Accept
7	Observing personal hygiene helps reduce the spread of Covid-19	1000	180	40	20	1,240	3.54	Accept
8	Observing public distance is a means of preventing the spread of Covid-19	1000	210	40	10	1,260	3.6	Accept

Data in table 4.3 above shows that all the responses were accepted thereby indicating the level of observance to Covid-19 rules

Research Question Three: what are the activities undertaking by the traditional institutions on Covid-19 health advocacy and awareness in the South East Senatorial district, Rivers State?

Table 4.4: Various activities undertaking by the traditional institutions on Covid-19 health advocacy and awareness in the South East Senatorial District, Rivers State

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Cumulative	Mean	Decision
9	Traditional media is used to propagate information on Covid-19 within my community	800	300	60	20	1,180	3.37	Accept
10	The advocacy programmes being executed by traditional rulers are in line with the demand and wishes of the grassroots	1000	180	40	20	1,240	3.54	Accept

11	The traditional institutions in your community have created public/enlightenment on health and safety issues	1000	210	40	20	1,260	3.6	Accept
12	The traditional institution in your community contributed to the development of Covid-19 health workers	1000	180	40	20	1,240	3.54	Accept

Table 4.4 above shows that all the responses were accepted, hence showing the various ways traditional rulers created Covid-19 awareness in their area.

Research Question four: What Communication strategies were used by Traditional Institutions on Covid-19 and health advocacy in the South East Senatorial District, Rivers State?

Table 4.5: Communication Strategy were used by Traditional Institutions on Covid-19 and health advocacy in the South East Senatorial District, Rivers State

S/N	Statement	Sa	A	D	Sd	Cumulative	Mean	Decision
13	Traditional Rulers, Age Grade And Other Community Group Meetings Were Major Communication Strategies On Covid-19 Health Advocacy	1040	150	40	20	1,250	3.57	Accept
14	Illiteracy Among Community Members Militated Against Effective Covid-19 Health Advocacy In Your Community	800	180	100	20	1,200	3.37	Accept
15	The Community Members Negative Perception Militated Against Effective Covid-19 Health Advocacy In Your Area	1000	180	40	20	1,240	3.54	Accept

Data in table 4.5 above shows that all the responses were accepted and that item twenty (13) indicated that traditional rulers, age grades and other community group meeting were major communication strategies on Covid-19 health advocacy.

Research Question Five: What are the challenges and barriers of health advocacy on Covid-19 by the traditional institutions in the South East Senatorial District, Rivers State?

Table 4.6: Challenges and barriers of health advocacy on Covid-19 by the traditional institutions in the South East Senatorial District, Rivers State

S/N	Statement	Sa	A	D	Sd	Cumulative	Mean	Decision
16	Language Was A Factor Militating Against Effective Covid-19 Advocacy In Your Community	800	300	60	20	1,180	3.37	Accept
17	The Educational Level Of Traditional Rulers Was A Factor Militating Against Effective Covid-19 Health Advocacy In Your Community	800	180	100	20	1,250	3.37	Accept
18	Traditional Rulers Use Town Hall Meetings To Create Health Advocacy And Awareness On Covid-19 Made Significant Impact In The South-East Senatorial	960	240	40	10	1,250	3.57	Accept

Data in table 4.6 above shows that all the responses were accepted and that item nineteen (19) indicated that traditional rulers use town hall meetings to create health advocacy and awareness on Covid-19 which made significant impact in the South-East Senatorial District.

Research Question Six: what was the influence of health advocacy and preventive strategies on Covid-19 by the traditional institutions on the people of South East Senatorial District, Rivers State?

Table 4.7: Influence of health advocacy and preventive strategies on Covid-19 by the traditional institutions on the people of South East Senatorial District, Rivers State

S/N	Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Cumulative	Mean	Decision
19	The application of local languages in communicating health awareness and advocacy by traditional institutions contributed to huge success in Covid-19 prevention	960	240	40	10	1,250	3.37	Accept
20.	The understanding and cooperation among traditional institutions increases participation in the health advocacy in the area	1000	210	40	10	1,260	3.6	Accept
21	Traditional institutions helped in enforcement of the lockdown policy in the community to seduce the spread by Covid-19 in the area	1040	150	40	20	1,250	3.57	Accept

Data in table 4.7 above shows that all the responses were accepted hence the health advocacy and preventive strategies on Covid-19 were effective.

Discussion of Findings

The study evaluated traditional institutions and health advocacy on Covid-19 in South-East Senatorial District, Rivers State. The analysis of collected data was segmented into two sections namely the descriptive statistics and the inferential statistics. In the first section, descriptive statistics was used to analyses the demographic characteristics of the study sample as well as the variables response to the distributed questionnaires. The descriptive statistics used the frequency, percentage and Weighted Means Score (Four Point Likert Scale) to elucidate the collected information of the study's respondents. In the second section, inferential statistics was used to test the hypothesis to show if there is a relationship between the stated hypothesis. The result of this study showed that communication strategies, used by traditional institutions had a positive and significant

relationship with health advocacy on covid-19 in the South-East Senatorial District, Rivers state. This led to the rejection of the null hypothesis Ho1, Ho2, and Ho3 and the acceptance of the associated alternate hypothesis.

Research Question 1: What was the level of advocacy and awareness on Covid-19 among indigenes in South-East Senatorial District, Rivers State?

Findings of this study revealed that majority of the respondents maintained that the level of advocacy and awareness on Covid-19 was high. These findings are in agreement with those of Julius (2020) that traditional rulers in Accra, Ghana used both traditional media of communication and the modern media in sensitizing their people to always wear face mask whenever they are in the public. The findings of this study also corroborate with earlier studies carried out by Nzubechi (2021) whose study showed that because traditional rulers are closer to the people, they were able to encourage their subjects to wear personal protective equipment especially those front line workers. The findings of this study equally affirm those of Francis and Akinwumu (2000) whose studies revealed that majority of the respondents indicated traditional rulers/institution are effective in health advocacy in Kwankuwa community in Kano State. The findings of this study also agree with Austin and Chukwu (2019) that the roles of traditional institutions were instrumental in advancing health advocacy in Khana, Rivers State. Finally, the findings corroborate those of Chikason (2023) that the inclusion of traditional institutions in carrying out the advocacy for health programmes in Mbano, Imo State made the campaign easier for the facilitators because the traditional rulers stood in between the gap for a better orientation.

Research Question 2: What were the risk behaviour and reinforcing factors of Covid-19 among the indigenes in the South East Senatorial District?

Findings of this study revealed that majority of the respondents indicated that the indigenes in the South-East Senatorial District were not involved in regular hand washing with running water and soap because most of them did not believe that the Covid-19 pandemic was real. The finding of this study agrees with the studies carried out by Ahuna (2000) that majority of the indigenes in Ebonyi state did not engage in social distancing and went about their daily activities because they did not believe the existence of the virus.

Moreso, findings of this study agree with those of Justin (2017) that personal hygiene, social distancing and regular washing of hands helps to curb the spread of the Covid-19 virus. Furthermore, it's corroborated with earlier studies carried out by Nweke (2019) that indigenes in Ebiro community did not engage in regular washing of hands with running water and soap and they went about their daily activities, engaging in public gatherings, going to the market and church services. The indigenes did not believe that the Covid-19 was real.

The findings of this study equally agree with earlier studies carried out by Austin and Caleb (2017) whose studies revealed that personal hygiene and social distancing plays a big role in limiting the spread of the Covid-19 virus. The findings of this study also corroborates with earlier studies carried out by Chika (2002) whose studies revealed indigenes did not heed the precautions given to protect themselves from contacting the Covid-19 virus in Mbano communities in Imo state. The findings revealed that indigenes of Mbano communities still went about their daily businesses and did not engage in social distancing and regular washing of hands.

Research Question 3: What were the activities undertaken by the traditional institutions on Covid-19 advocacy and awareness in the South-East Senatorial District, Rivers State?

The findings of this study revealed that majority of the respondents maintained that the traditional institutions in the senatorial district created public awareness/enlightenment on health and safety issues and that the traditional institutions used traditional media to propagate information on Covid-19 pandemic to the people. Findings also reveal that traditional rulers also held advocacy programmes. The traditional institutions also created public enlightenment on health and safety issues.

The findings of this study agree with those of Nwachukwu and Ndalu (2020) whose studies revealed that the respondents with the best health advocacy carried out in rural areas incorporated the traditional institutions. The findings of the study also corroborated with those of Ekoh *et al* (2021) whose studies revealed that the traditional rulers adopted measures such as the use of town criers to raise awareness among residents in rural south-east, Nigeria.

Moreso, findings of this study affirm with Ndubuisi (2014) that traditional institution adopted the use of local dialects to sensitize their people concerning the control and prevention of Ebola virus in Ugwunukpanpan, Anambra State. The findings of this study also agree with Chikason (2003) which revealed that the inclusion of traditional institutions in carrying out the advocacy for health equity in Ngbano, Imo State made the campaign easier for the facilitators because the traditional rulers stood in between the gap for a better orientation.

The findings is also in agreement with Majek (2017) findings which revealed that traditional institutions where included in health advocacy in Mokwata, Jigawa State and they played prominent role in the health advocacy carried out because they are closer to the people.

Research Question 4: What communication strategies were used by traditional institutions on Covid-19 health advocacy in the South-East Senatorial District, Rivers state?

Findings of the study showed that the use of traditional rulers, age grades and other community group meetings were some of the communication strategies on health advocacy. Equally, findings of this study affirm with Ezeah (2020) that revealed that interpersonal communication was effective in improving knowledge about the pandemic among rural communities.

The findings of this study are also in agreement with Ukpong (2017) whose study reveals that traditional communication is useful and effective for creating health awareness; traditional communication or media tools exist for creating health awareness and can be strategically used to reach the rural populace.

Findings of this study is also in agreement with earlier studies corroborates with earlier studies carried out by Nzebechi (2021) whose studies revealed that traditional institutions are better off in sensitizing and educating the rural populace since they belief in them. The findings of the study is also in agreement with earlier studies carried out by Abaneme *et al* (2021) which revealed that town criers were used as a source of information amongst the rural dwellers as a result of the huge dependence on traditional media.

The findings of the study is also in agreement with an earlier study carried out by Ohanyere, Umukoro and Nwagwu (2022) which revealed that town criers, village square amongst other traditional communication systems should be used to spread safety measures put in place to control spread of diseases and other pandemics.

Research Question 5: What are the challenges and barriers of health advocacy on Covid-19 by the traditional institutions in the South-East Senatorial District, Rivers State?

Findings of the study revealed that illiteracy among community members wasone of the challenges/barriers that militated against the effectiveness of Covid-19 health advocacy in the senatorial district. The findings also showed that the community member negative preconceptions also militated against effectiveness of Covid-19 health advocacy and awareness in the senatorial district. Findings of this study is in agreement with the earlier studies carried out by Dickson (2002) whose studies revealed that cultural and social norms surrounding health behavours and low literacy levels posed a challenge for the traditional institutions in the health advocacy programme in the community.

The findings of the study are in agreement with Dominic (2017) whose study revealed that limited transportation options and poor educational levels caused a major barrier in health advocacy in Mokwatea, Jigawa State. The findings of this study is also corroborates with earlier studies carried out by Nwoko (2022) whose studies showed that cultural beliefs and low health literacy levels caused a barrier in enlightening the indigenes on the dangers of contacting the deadly virus.

Also, the findings of this study affirm with those of Francis(2020) which revealed that different perceptions of health and low literacy level posed a challenge to the traditional institutions in sensitizing the community members on covid-19 and its preventive measures.

Research Questsion 6: What was the influence of health advocacy and preventive strategies on Covid-19 by traditional institutions on the people of South-East Senatorial District, Rivers State?

Findings of the study showed that traditional institutions applied local languages in communicating health advocacy to the indigenes contributed to huge success of Covid-19 prevention in the senatorial district. The findings of the study also revealed that the traditional institutions reinforced the lockdown policy in the communities to reduce the spread of Covid-19 in the senatorial district. Findings of this study are in agreement with Nzubechi (2021) which revealed that traditional institutions were better off in sensitizing and educating the rural people since they believe in them.

Furthermore, findings of this study corroborate with those of Julius (2020) which showed that traditional rulers persuaded their subjects to always put on face mask especially in the public. In addition, findings of this study affirm with Austin and Chukwu (2019) which showed that traditional institutions played prominent riles in health advocacy in Khana, Rivers State.

Also, findings of this study are in agreement with Nwangwu (2022) which revealed that traditional rulers in the South East played key role in the campaign against spread of corona virus in their region. Moreso, findings of this study are also in agreement with Ndubuisi (2014) which shows that traditional institutions adopted the use of local dialect to sensitize their people concerning the control and prevention of ebola virus in Ugwumukpankpan, Anambra State. The traditional communicating channels are not left behind in the communication process. Findings of this study is also in agreement with earlier studies carried out by Lazarus and Akindele (2018) whose studies revealed that traditional institutions played major roles in educating their subjects on the preventive measures of Lasa fever by telling them to always cover their foods.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, we conclude that traditional institutions used traditional communication media to effectively drive advocacy and awareness in the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the response of the residents was influenced by illiteracy and misconceptions about the pandemic.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made;

1. Traditional media are essential channels of communication amongst the rural citizens' of the South East Senatorial District thus, they should be sustained and given priority by the government in order to create public awareness and safety measures;
2. The consequences of disregarding medical advice may be unbearable therefore, traditional institutions should incorporate age grade, traditional rulers and other groups meetings as part of their communication strategies in carrying out health advocacy and awareness;
3. Traditional Institution in the rural area should be integrated into government policies as a medium of advocacy especially during pandemic and other related health diseases.
4. The dialect of the people should be used in health advocacy so as to pave way for easy understanding and acceptance of the information being relayed;
5. It is also very important to intensify efforts to educate the community members against negative preconception on the reality of the deadly Covid-19 pandemic in the South East Senatorial District.

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