

Prospect of Traditional Medicine in the Race for Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Vaccine

ADEPOJU Sodiq olakunle

M.Sc. Sociology, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Research Executive at Deep Dive Research Limited

Abstract:- This paper offers an insight into the COVID-19 debacle as it highlights the ravaging impact of the disease and the struggle faced across the globe to overcome it. It took a brief account of the history of Traditional Medicine and its proven efficacy in overcoming all forms of human illnesses across historical milieu. It also adapted a Marxist approach in explaining the strained relationship between Modern and Traditional healthcare practitioners, the failures of the modern healthcare system in meeting the health demands of the people and the many biases and prejudices on Traditional Medicine by the proponents of the Modern Healthcare proponents. It further delved into the potentials of Traditional Medicine in overcoming COVID-19 by identifying some traditional herbs and plants with proven antiviral and immune boosting potentials and recommended the need for genuine efforts at promoting a relationship of cooperation and mutual respect and bridging the equity gap that currently exists.

Keywords: Coronavirus, Traditional Medicine, Anti-Viral, Vaccine, Health

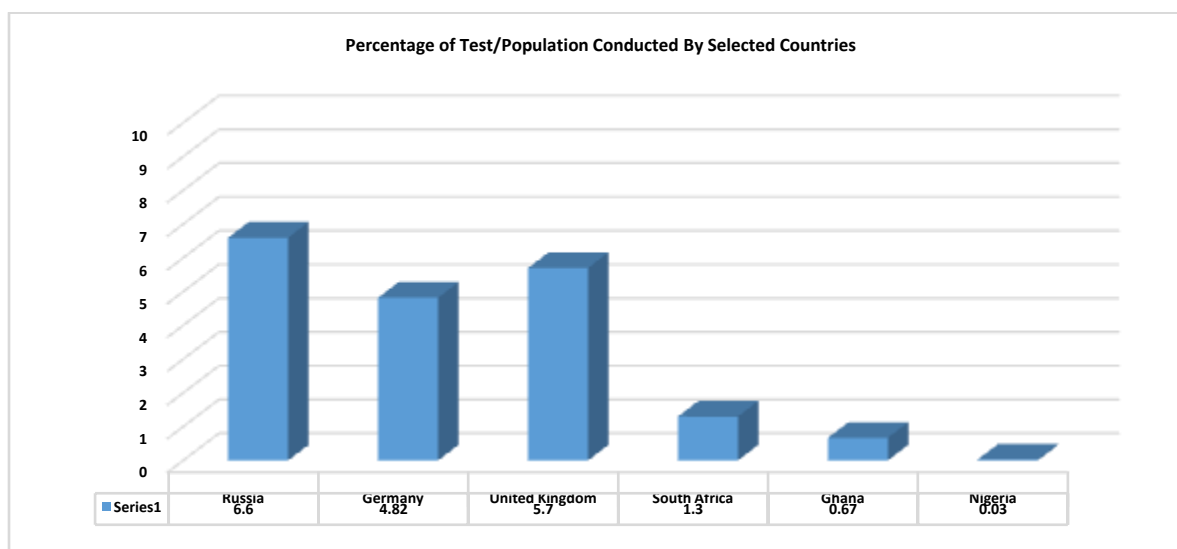
I. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF CORONAVIRUS DISEASE (COVID 19)

There is no gainsaying the fact that the Corona Virus Disease (COVID) 19 has ravaged the world in no small degree. This is due to its bearing on all countries of the world leading to a worldwide health catastrophe that has attained pandemic proportions. In fact, it is arguably the greatest pandemic known to man with over 6.5 million infections and an estimated 400,000 deaths arising from the virus across six continents across the globe. Furthermore, the Coronavirus disease has crushed economies around the globe with substantial pecuniary effect. While a handful of some governments have announced measures to safeguard jobs and guarantee incomes, such processes are either non-existent or lacking clarity in implementation strategies in many countries, especially in the sub-Saharan African region leaving citizens in an apprehensive mood with little or no palliatives for majority of whom earn their living on a per day income. This has created a twin burden of health and wealth crisis. Consequently, while indoors and afraid of infections, there is fear of hunger as many are unable to provide necessities for their dependents. More scary is the continuous rate of infection which has created a continuous apprehension since the citizens are unaware of when the pandemic will subside; a problem further compounded on a lack of testing and inability

to manage the disease in pandemic proportions in the continent.

In the words of the World Health Organization (2020), Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses that may cause disease in animals or humans. According to John Elflein (2020), symptoms of COVID 19 include fever, sneezing, cough, sore throat, fatigue, and malaise leading to complications such as pneumonia, multi-organ failure, acute respiratory distress syndrome, and even death. Currently, there is no specific vaccine or cure and treatment regimen as efforts is towards symptom elimination treatment including the use of antiviral drugs, oxygen therapy and improving of the immune system. As the rise in Covid-19, infection and death continue unabated, and with no known vaccine for prevention or cure, massive testing and prompt identification of infected persons is acknowledged as vital in circumventing community transmissions and stemming the tide of infection. Countries in the other continents of the world have been ramping up their testing programs recently in an effort to limit the spread and damage of the coronavirus pandemic, in Africa; South Africa has enforced a very strict lockdown and has achieved a relatively high level of testing estimated at 16,000 a day. Ghana on its own part has chosen not to implement harsh lockdown measures to protect the economy and has successfully conducted over 160,000 tests in her eleven testing centres.

In Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation with an estimated 200 million people, there are a limited number of laboratories able to process tests. The low level of test according to Nigerian Medical Association raises a concern as it makes it impossible to determine the real incidence of the virus in the country. The low level of testing also makes the currently circulated figures of infection and death arising from COVID 19 not only pseudo but also portends a grave potential for community transmission as evident in the outbreak of 'strange illness' and increasing death in some parts of the country. While the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) has done creditably well in informing the citizenry about the outbreak and safety cues to adopt, it is shocking to note that 3 months after the recording of her index case, Nigeria has only conducted 60,000 tests which cover less than 0.5% of the population.



II. EFFICACY OF TRADITIONAL MEDICINE IN CURBING A VARIETY OF ILLNESSES

Catering for the health of the populace has been a dire challenge to all civilizations across historical milieus – a quest overcome by the evolution of health care systems that would not only take care of the health of the populace but also within the socio-cultural boundaries of the society. Like all ancient civilization and prior to colonial connection, Africans advanced a native health care system that did not only flourish in both rural and urban areas but effectively served the needs of its people. Traditional Medicine therefore symbolized a secular practice involving the use of medicinal plants for therapeutic purposes in different cultures and societies. It contains active ingredients that have not only proven to be cultural and natural but equally effective in prevention and cure of variety of diseases.

Again, Traditional Medicine offers merits over other forms of medicine in such areas as the following: discovery of lead compounds and drug candidates; examining drug-like activity; and exploring physicochemical, biochemical, pharmacokinetic, and toxicological characteristics. When used to develop new drugs, traditional medicine have shown potentials in their unique diversity of chemical structures and biological activities and significant cost reduction. According to Parasuraman, Thing, & Dhanaraj, (2014), in Traditional Medicine, a single herb may contain many phytochemical constituents, which functions alone or in conjunction with one another to produce the desired pharmacological effect. It is notable that several plant-originated drugs in clinical medicine today were derived from Traditional Medicine (Li-Weber, 2009). In addition, the many valuable drugs derived from plants gained popularity through their application in Traditional Medicine (Fabricant & Farnsworth, 2001). Omonzejele (2008) puts it as being the first port of call before Modern medicine and a last resort when all modern efforts fail.

With the contact with the colonialists however, the health care system went through melodramatic change, thereby, paving way for the wholesome adoption of the modern medicine. The acceptance and subsequent adoption of this health care system has led to castigating of all manners of aspersions against traditional medicine. While Modern medicine has evolved over time to be the most promoted means of health care, the use of traditional remedies has not been abandoned and remedies still persists in Nigeria, especially in the rural areas where access to modern medicine may be unavailable, unaffordable or unacceptable to the populace (Olowokere & Olajide, 2013).

III. CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE FAILURE OF THE MODERN HEALTHCARE MODEL AND THE UNFAIR TREATMENT METED TOWARDS TRADITIONAL MEDICINE IN NIGERIA

Interestingly, the history of relationship between the traditional and modern medicine in Nigeria and other countries around the continent is deep-rooted in conflict. While practitioners of Traditional medicine perceive it to be safe, there is a predominant assumption of toxicity, teratogenic potentials among modern healthcare practitioners (Bamidele, Adebimpe, & Oladele, 2009). In spite of the innumerable benefits derivable from traditional medicine, no effort is been channeled towards empowering or supporting the practitioners for enhanced performance, rather perception as primitive and uncivilized continue to persist and often depict elements of disdain, mistrust, suspicion, bigotry and resentment. On the other hand, the modern healthcare system has not proven to be a messiah but serves to widen the gap of healthcare needs, as the system is replete with amenities that often are inapt to the healthcare needs of the people. While the allocation to the healthcare sector is consistently low and insignificant, a huge part of the budget is channeled towards urban settlement leaving the over 70 percent of the population who are rural dwellers with insufficient coverage. Added to

this is the fact that the distribution of health workers is skewed towards urban centres with acute shortages in rural locations. This same structure illuminates our failures in providing healthcare as it promotes a disproportion allocation of resources where 95% of our health budget goes to the Tertiary health care sector and 5% to the Primary Health Sector that carries the huge load of health burden. According to Owumi (2002), this same moribund healthcare system has made us forsake the traditional healthcare system by doing away from it without an attainable alternative making us a slave and alienating us in a system meant to serve us. This is corroborated by WHO in its 2008 report where it opined, “the capitalist ideology has blighted and served a barricade that has affected humanity in all ramification including health” WHO (2008). This ill-fated setback, according to Marxian school will be changed by the advent of strange diseases that would serve to enforce and ensure a just allocation of resources and adequate attention to the healthcare system.

Today, the predicted “strange disease”, COVID 19 has become a realization and has defied all vaccinations, amid growing rate of infections and deaths. Unfortunately, we are entangled to the slavery of the modern healthcare solely for cure. In reality, we have professionals who are largely unequipped and underfunded to make such huge breakthroughs. In view of this this limitations, one would expect that we look inwards and harness local resources to identify possible homemade remedies that could provide cure or give a pathway to cure, with herbs and leaves. Unfortunately, in our usual, slave-mentality to the modern health system, the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) not only showed a lack of faith in such noble and ground-breaking possibility but roundly discouraged any effort made in that regard warning that such advances are unwelcomed and would not be recognized.

The same attitude is shown towards the locally manufactured PPEs, ventilators and even use of local flights in repatriation of Nigerians and one begins to wonder if they have some inimical or exterior motives for such irrationalities and crass display of ignorance and wanton show of shame. Rather, they kept praise singing and gallivanting over basic steps they have taken and even priding it as the leading approaches. All the initial success claims and self-praise happened in atmosphere of little testing, which has not only led to huge community transmission, but also loss of contact tracing which are vital in arresting the scourge of further infection. Today, ;Lagos state with a less than a thousand bed space is overwhelmed by just 7 thousand infection, majority of whom have gone, have gone into the thin air, once confirmed to have been infected. In the Northern parts of the country, it is not surprising to hear about the rising mortality as confirmed by undertakers who noted an increase in rate of burials. Unfortunately, many of these incidences have come to be tagged as “strange deaths” with

many state governors insisting that such occurrences were unrelated to the COVID 19 disease.

Rather than providing counterpart funding or assurance of promising and tantalizing rewards for herbalists who make concrete efforts in overcoming the COVID 19 disease, the government has roundly dissuaded the search for cure through that route. They not only condemned preliminary findings but also further went to inform the citizenry to desist from such efforts. Perhaps we are under the pseudo impression that when the American scientist find a cure, that they would as usual lend a hand of assistance by sending such to us as aids which we have come to see as our birth right. While the dispatch of these drugs as aid could possibly occur, America would treat her own citizens first, and who says we cannot lead the world in the battle against the virus.

It was not until Madagascar made a breakthrough and roundly condemned the WHO for non-recognition of its vaccine that Nigeria saw a silver linen in the Traditional Medicine. We pride ourselves as African giants but one needs to question how much of how efforts and achievement truly points to such inglorious allusion. We are simply dwelling in the ecstasy of an utopian fantasy. It is time to desist from the colonial and capitalist mentality that has bestowed an inferiority complex that has plagued deeply into the fabrics of our everyday life and nationhood. As the Yoruba’s would say, Ounti a nwa lo sokoto wa lapo sokoto wa. It is left for us to harness the potentials of the God given talents with the use of herbs into efficacious use.

IV. PROPERTIES OF HERBS THAT CAN POTENTIALLY CURE COVID 19

Contagious diseases is an anathema that has threatened human existence across historical milieu and Traditional medicine offers a huge collection with great potentials of unravelling the mysteries around human pathologies. A substantial number of plant extracts and phytochemicals have been explored for antiviral property. Herbal preparations owing to their holistic approach strengthen the body’s immune system, which in turn may help the body fight against invading infectious viruses. Herbal antiviral compounds, which are accessible and do not require laborious pharmaceutical synthesis are emerging as interesting alternatives in today’s world of growing resistance to antiviral drug therapy. In the continuous hunt for a vaccine against the COVID 19 Virus, and in light of the successes achieved in Madagascar, the resort to traditional plants and herbs becomes inevitable, especially those that have been proven to pose lethal potential against viruses. Consequently, it is a suitable approach to find agents that can be expressed under plant systems to induce the immunological system against the virus in order to have mucosal or long-term immunity.



Traditional Medicine is effective in combating various types of viruses. While some help to boost the immune system and help fight infections, other provides anti-bodies to help overcome viral illnesses making it worthwhile to explore Traditional Medicine against the COVID 19. While it might be premature to recommend absolutely resort to Traditional Medicine in the search for cure for the COVID 19 pandemic, the many prejudices against the age-long form of therapy is dangerous an antithetical to the onerous search for a COVID 19 cure.

V. CONCLUSION

In the onerous fight towards stemming the tide of infection and evolving a vaccine, there is the need for genuine efforts towards aligning with the global trends in traditional medicine discourses for the benefit of all and sundry. This requires both traditional and modern practitioners to recognize their areas of strengths and weaknesses from which they operate, in order to minimize the current distrust and the perceived paranoid between both parties. According to the Beijing Declaration published by the WHO (2008), there is the need for a partnership between modern and traditional medicine to help bridge the equity gap in public health and highlights the importance of research to support the development of traditional herbal medicine in delivering appropriate, safe and effective treatments. In the words of Abdullahi (2011), there is an urgent need for appropriate legal frameworks to check the deeds of cons and charlatans in the practice of traditional medicine in an attempt to achieve regulation, rebranding and standardization of traditional medicine for the benefit of millions of people who depend on traditional medicine in Africa. The adoption of Remdesivir by America and other countries of the world is not due to its efficiency in curing or preventing the virus. Rather, its adoption is based its

perceived efficacy in slowing down the impact of COVID 19 on infected persons. While many initially questioned America's huge investment on it, the resolve by the UK, Egypt and India to adopt the same approach shows the forward thinking mentality and well-articulated plans of these governments to ensure that the impact if the Virus is reduced to the barest minimum. All hands must be on deck in this onerous fight towards stemming the tide of infection and evolving vaccine that is not only viable is curing the affected person but also one that helps to prevent the virus.

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