

Care of Hearing Impaired and Physically Challenged People during Covid-19 Pandemic: Challenges and Prospects

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the challenges encountered while providing care for physically challenged and hearing-impaired individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. Taking into account the difficulties these individuals already face in their daily lives; the pandemic aggravated their situation. Due to their inability to see, talk, walk, and actively engage in social interactions, caring for them became especially challenging. The responsibility for their care was left to non-professionals, which worsened existing issues like caregiver shortages, a lack of learning materials, and inadequate medical attention. The pandemic added more problems, such as lockdowns, limited access to medical personnel, and a shift away from face-to-face learning methods. The Symbolic Interaction Theory was used in this research to analyze the communication of COVID-19 messages to hearing-impaired and physically challenged residents, as well as the interactions between caregivers and residents in care homes. The study followed a quantitative research design and obtained primary data from 114 hearing-impaired and physically challenged individuals across three senatorial districts in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study found that the pandemic had an unexpected and unprepared impact on individuals. It also revealed that pre-existing challenges were exacerbated by COVID-19. Participants in the study expressed a lack of essential resources, such as wheelchairs, electronic gadgets, and adequate training. Caregivers also faced difficulties in securing government and philanthropic support, with many contracting the virus and experiencing psychological and economic impacts. In conclusion, the research stresses the ongoing need for improved care for physically challenged and hearing-impaired individuals beyond the pandemic. It advocates for the inclusion of a curriculum on the care of these individuals in primary and secondary education to promote societal recognition and support for their unique needs.

Keywords: Hearing impaired, physically challenged, COVID-19 pandemic, Care challenges, Symbolic Interaction Theory.

INTRODUCTION:

Hearing-impaired and physically challenged individuals exhibit distinct differences in mental, sensory, communication, social, and physical characteristics (Chua et al., 1992; Ramayah et al., 2020). Recognizing these distinctions is paramount to providing the necessary support for them to thrive and develop their full potential. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare various layers of segregation for people with impairments, significantly impacting them disproportionately.

Experiencing Exclusion and Isolation:

While the pandemic affects everyone indiscriminately, it has revealed disparities created by human-made

barriers and constraints in terms of capital and liberties. The imposed lockdowns and social distancing measures, commendable for controlling the pandemic, have resulted in unexpected difficulties for hearing-impaired and physically challenged individuals. The World Economic Forum reports a sense of exclusion and isolation felt by humans, emphasizing that this feeling is not new but rather a norm for many (Nortajuddin, 2020).

Neglected Challenges:

Despite efforts to protect the rights of individuals with hearing impairments and physical challenges during the pandemic, some have been neglected, particularly those who are hearing-impaired (Nortajuddin, 2020). Governments are urged to make extra efforts to safeguard their rights.

Research Objectives:

This paper aims to delve into the challenges and prospects faced by hearing-impaired and physically challenged individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, it examines the direct impact of the pandemic on residents in Lagos State, Nigeria, investigating coping mechanisms adopted by caregivers, and suggesting measures to support these individuals during emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Questions:

To shed light on the challenges faced, the paper addresses three crucial questions: What impact does the COVID-19 pandemic have on hearing-impaired and physically challenged individuals in Lagos State, Nigeria? What coping mechanisms have caregivers adopted to protect them during the pandemic? And what measures can be taken to support these individuals during emergencies?

Significance and Practical Implications:

This study not only contributes to a better understanding of the challenges faced by hearing-impaired and physically challenged individuals during the pandemic but also serves as a reference for future research. It emphasizes the importance of their well-being, providing valuable insights for medical professionals in fulfilling their duties towards these individuals and promoting health and inclusivity (Islam, 2015). This study delves into the intricate challenges faced by hearing-impaired and physically challenged individuals during the global COVID-19 pandemic, specifically focusing on the context in Lagos State, Nigeria. While the pandemic has garnered widespread attention for its impact on respiratory health, its consequences on vulnerable groups, such as those with hearing impairment and physical challenges, have remained largely overlooked.

Understanding the Context:

The emergence of zoonotic coronaviruses, notably highlighted by the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV) in 2003, has set the stage for the novel coronavirus (nCoV) responsible for COVID-19. The virus's potential for zoonotic transmission and severe human illnesses prompted global investigations (Armitage et al., 2020; Cahapay, 2020; Dan, 2020; Gumbo, 2020). The rapid international response since the virus's outbreak in Wuhan, China, on February 12, 2020, has led to extensive preventive measures, including lockdowns, travel restrictions, and global financial allocations for combating the pandemic (CDC, 2014; Islam, 2015; Davis, 2011; WHO, 2020).

Significance of the Study:

This research extends beyond the epidemiological scope of COVID-19 to shed light on the unique challenges faced by hearing-impaired and physically challenged individuals during the pandemic. As

nations like the US, UK, Germany, Italy, and Nigeria grapple with the virus's impact, it is crucial to recognize and address the distinctive needs of this marginalized demographic. The COVID-19 statistics underscore the urgency of this exploration, with global cases surpassing 478,000 by March 26, 2020, accompanied by significant mortality and recovery rates (Garciulo, 2003; Menon, 2019).

Defining the Population:

Hearing-impaired and physically challenged individuals, characterized by differences from societal norms, face significant obstacles due to their physical, sensory, cognitive, or behavioral characteristics (Rayyan et al., 2020). This study focuses on those with disabilities severe enough to profoundly affect normal life and cognitive development (Abdul et al., 2006; Meadow et al., 1985; Chung et al., 2020).

Symbolic Interaction and Pandemic Communication:

Symbolic Interaction Theory by George Mead serves as the theoretical framework for understanding how COVID-19 messages are communicated to the hearing impaired. This theory guides the examination of interactions between caregivers and individuals with hearing impairment and physical challenges in care homes. Recognizing that society is socially constructed through human interpretation, this theory underscores the subjective meanings people impose on objects, events, and behaviors.

Disabilities and Poverty:

Highlighting the intersectionality of disabilities and poverty, this study emphasizes that people with disabilities are often the world's poorest. This disadvantage arises from societal attitudes that limit educational opportunities and economic participation, perpetuating segregation and marginalization (World Bank, 2010).

Implications for Education:

Students with hearing impairment face unique challenges in the educational landscape. The impact on their learning processes, exacerbated by COVID-19, raises concerns about vocabulary and reading skills, preferred visual learning styles, and access to technological aids such as FM systems during lectures (Chung et al., 2020; Olson et al., 1993; Antonak et al., 1988; Cook, 1992).

Pandemic and Mental Health:

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates mental health issues for individuals with disabilities, with increased anxiety and depression reported, particularly for children. The lack of consideration for their unique healthcare needs further complicates their well-being during the pandemic (UNICEF, 2020c; Armitage et al., 2020).

Prejudices and Discrimination:

Prejudices, stigma, and discrimination persist against individuals with hearing impairment and physical challenges. Misconceptions surrounding their capabilities during the outbreak response contribute to increased exposure to abuse, neglect, and reduced access to services (UNICEF, 2021; UNICEF, 2020b).

Global Response and Economic Impact:

As countries worldwide implement measures to curb the virus's spread, including lockdowns, quarantines, and hygiene protocols, the study emphasizes the unintended consequences on the hearing impaired and physically challenged. The economic impact of such measures on this demographic becomes a critical

aspect of examination (Doyle, 2002; Armitage et al., 2020; Dan, 2020; Gumbo, 2020).

METHODOLOGY:

Research Design:

Embarking on a journey to uncover the intricacies of the COVID-19 impact on hearing-impaired and physically challenged individuals, a robust cross-sectional survey was chosen as the methodological compass. This design aptly suits the task at hand, as it enables the inclusion of participants from diverse backgrounds spanning the three senatorial districts in Lagos state.

Setting:

Navigating the landscape of care homes across Lagos Central (70 participants), Lagos West (70 participants), and Lagos East (70 participants), a total of 225 hearing-impaired and physically challenged individuals, along with 15 dedicated caregivers, became the protagonists in this research narrative.

Sampling Techniques:

Drawing inspiration from Hayes (2021), the research employed stratified random sampling, a method involving the categorization of the population into sub-groups or strata. Coupled with systematic random sampling, the study meticulously selected participants. A judicious calculation of the sampling interval using the formula $i = N/n$, along with a carefully chosen starting point, laid the foundation for the inclusion of diverse voices. A suite of self-designed questionnaires was then administered, creating an inclusive platform for data collection.

Instruments:

The research instrument, aptly named “Challenges and Prospects Facing Hearing Impaired and Physically Challenged People During the COVID-19 Pandemic” or CHaC-19 drew inspiration from the work of Alqudah (2021) and Gaeta (2020). Permission was sought and obtained from the original authors for adapting and incorporating their questionnaires. CHaC-19, a comprehensive questionnaire, spans sections capturing demographics, the pandemic’s impact on participants, coping mechanisms adopted by caregivers, and the support extended during these challenging times. Respondents navigated a 5-point Likert scale, with open-ended sections providing an avenue for nuanced expressions. Recognizing the diverse linguistic backgrounds of the participants, CHaC-19 was made available in English.

Data Collection:

The research embarked on a holistic exploration, employing both questionnaires and interviews conducted in structured sections. Aligned with the guidance of Miles et al. (1994), the questions seamlessly wove into the fabric of the study’s objectives. The approach allowed for an organic conversation, facilitating an in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by the participants.

Data Analysis:

With a treasure trove of narratives and responses in hand, the collected data underwent a meticulous statistical analysis. Employing the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), the study delved into regression analysis to unveil the intricate relationships between independent and dependent variables. Percentages and frequency were harnessed as additional tools, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the data.

Ethical Considerations:

Respecting the dignity and rights of every participant, the study adhered to the highest ethical standards. Informed consent was diligently obtained from all participants, who were thoroughly briefed on the study’s objectives. The research journey received the ethical green light from the local ethics committee, ensuring the protection of participants and the integrity of the study. All data was anonymized, safeguarding the privacy and confidentiality of each contributor.

RESULTS:

This section of the paper presents the results of the analysis of data gathered from the survey. The section is divided into subsections such as socio-demographics characteristics, impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, coping mechanisms, and support mechanisms for hearing impaired and physically challenged residents in Lagos State.

4.1. Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics

	Gender			
	Male (n= 91)	Female (n= 134)		All (n=225)
	% of males	% of females	P value	%
	Age group			
<18 years	—	4.5		2.7
18-24 years	22.0	32.8		28.4
25-29 years	24.2	31.3		28.4
30-34 years	22.0	9.0		14.2
35-39 years	12.1	2.2		6.2
40-60 years	16.5	17.2		16.9
>60years	3.3	3.0	0.001**	3.1
	Educational level			
SSCE/ND	65.9	71.6		69.3
NCE/HND/Bsc	17.6	15.7		16.4
Msc	12.1	6.7		8.9
PhD	4.4.	6.0	0.496	5.3
	Marital Status			
Single	68.1	71.6		70.2
Married	18.7	15.7		16.9
Separated	11.0	9.7		10.2
Widower	—	0.7		0.4
Divorced	2.2	2.2	0.886	2.2
	Occupation			
Students	24.2	32.8		29.3

Professional	19.8	20.1		20.0
Independent	56	47.0	0.323	<u>50.7</u>
(p< 0.001**), (n=225)				
a: Chi-square (X^2) test				

The results of the socio-demographic characteristics revealed that the majority of the study sample was female (n = 134), it is found a statistically significant difference between age groups by gender (p< 0.001**). More than half respondents were between 18 to 29 years old (56.8%). 69.3% of the sample are SSCE/ND., and 16.4% of the participants are NCE/HND/B.SC holders., 8.9% are with M.SC certificates., and 5.3% have PhD degrees. In terms of marital status, single (72.2%), married (16.9%), separated (10.2%), widower (0.4%) and divorced (2.2%). In terms of the occupation of hearing impaired and physically challenged people, 29.3 % were students, 20.0% were professional and 50.7% were independent.

Table 4.2: Impact of COVID-19 pandemic have done on hearing-impaired and physically challenged residents.

Responses	%	%	%	%
Depressed, anxiety, and sleep disturbances	4.4	6.0		5.3
Decreased social life and fewer in-person social interactions	12.1	6.7		8.9
Lack of access to basic needs such as education, health, and food	65.9	71.6		69.3
Compliance with COVID-19 measures/reduced physical activities and concerns for medical care	17.6	15.7	0.496	16.4

The following research question was asked from the participants: what impact does the COVID-19 pandemic have on hearing-impaired and physically challenged residents in Lagos State, Nigeria? Participants reported that COVID-19 had several impacts on people living with hearing impairment and physical challenges. The results of the findings show that the majority (69.3%) of the participants reported that lack of access to basic needs such as education, health, and food., 16.4% of the participants reported that compliance with COVID-19 measures /reduced physical activities and concern for medical care were the challenges they faced., 8.9% reported that decreased social life and fewer in-person social interactions and those who said depressed, anxious and sleep disturbances were 5.3%. This implies that lack of access to basic needs such as education, health, and food was the major challenge during the COVID-19 era; they did not get education services, had limited health services, and felt lonely as they could not interact with their peers. Children with disabilities also did not receive much support from the government and non-governmental organizations, those who did not have movement aids before the pandemic failed to get support during the pandemic and they did not get social services packages or allowances from the government as well.

Table 4.3. Coping mechanisms adopted by careers to protect hearing impaired and physically challenged residents during COVID-19.

Responses	%	%	%	%
social/family support	68.1	71.6		70.2

Increase financial Status	18.7	15.7		16.9
Counseling center	11.0	9.7		10.2
Self-encouragement	—	0.7		0.4
movement aids	2.2	2.2	0.886	2.2

Attempts were made to measure the coping mechanisms adopted by careers to protect hearing-impaired and physically challenged residents. The question was drafted like this what are the coping mechanisms adopted by careers to protect hearing impaired and physically challenged in their residents during COVID-19? The results revealed that the majority (70.2%) of the participants mentioned social/family support as a coping mechanism adopted by careers participants., 16.9% suggested Increased financial status, 10.2 (Counseling center)., 0.4% (self-encouragement) and movement aids (2.2%).

Table 4. Support hearing impaired and physically challenged residents during emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Responses	%	%		%
Education	4.4	6.0		5.3
Hearing devices/Disability aids	12.1	6.7		8.9
Empowerment	65.9	71.6		69.3
Employment	17.6	15.7	0.496	16.4

The results show that the majority of the study sample (69.3%) reported that empowerment is a good support for the hearing impaired and physically challenged and it will make them become active contributors to the community and society at large. 16.4% of the sample suggested employment as what to do to support them., 8.9% suggested hearing devices/disability aids, and 5.3% ticked education as what to do to support them. This implies that the community, especially parents, needs advice, knowledge, and assistance so that hearing-impaired and physically challenged people can be appropriately guided during the COVID-19 pandemic.

DISCUSSION:

The results of these findings reported that COVID-19 had several impacts on people living with hearing impairment and physical challenges. The results of the findings show that the majority of the participants reported that lack of access to basic needs such as education, health and food, compliance with COVID-19 measures /reduced physical activities, and concern for medical care were the challenges they faced while others reported that decreased social life and fewer in-person social interactions and depression, anxious and sleep disturbances were the challenges of the minority of the participants. The findings of Athira (2020) and (UNICEF, 2021) were in line with the present study that COVID-19 had several impacts on people living with hearing impairment and physical challenges.

On the coping mechanisms adopted by careers to protect hearing impaired and physically challenged residents, the results revealed that the majority of the participants mentioned that if they are given social/family support if they increase their financial status, it will serve as a coping mechanism, others fund counseling center, self-encouragement, and movement aids as coping mechanisms. Rayya (2020)., Chung, Subramaniam, and Christ, (2020) findings supported the findings of this study.

The results also show that the majority of the study sample reported that empowering and employing them is what the Government /parents can do to support them. It will make them become active contributors to the community and society at large. Minority suggested hearing devices/disability aids and education as to what to do to support them. This implies that the community, especially parents, needs advice, knowledge, and assistance so that hearing-impaired and physically challenged people can be appropriately guided during the COVID-19 pandemic. The findings of the studies of (Armitage & Nellums, 2020., Cahapay, 2020., and Dan, 2020., Gumbo, 2020) corroborated the results of the current study.

CONCLUSION:

Based on the results of these findings, it can be concluded that COVID-19 had several impacts on people living with hearing impairment and physical challenges. The results of the findings show that the majority of the participants reported that lack of access to basic needs such as education, health and food, depression, sleep disturbance, compliance with COVID-19 measures /reduced physical activities, and concern for medical care were the challenges they faced.

It was revealed that the majority of the participants mentioned that if they are given social/family support if they increase their financial status, it will serve as a coping mechanism.

The results also show that the majority of the study sample reported that empowering and employing them, devices/disability aids, and education are what the Government/parents can do to support them. It will make them become active contributors to the community and society at large.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Government /parents must make sure they assist by affording health and safety policies, including managing anxiety and depression that could result from lockdown

The government should provide financial assistance to help people with hearing impairment and physical challenges if the need arises.

All institutions must be assigned a special task force to facilitate people with hearing impairments and physically challenged people.

Parents/caregivers must play an important role in ensuring that people cope with life during the pandemic so that the consequences will not affect their future.

They should provide necessary facilities for disabling, during the pandemic. Therefore, they are not hindered. This also should be monitored by the

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:

The main weakness of this study was the paucity of number of participants. It is good to have more participants to elicit more information on the participants during the pandemic. This study was also limited by the absence of a research assistant to assist in administering questionnaires to the participants. They consider the sensitivity of the privacy of the people in the case and the honor and dignity of the parents and family members.

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