

Covid -19 Safety Protocol Awareness And Implementation Among Selected Fresh Food Marketers In Yenagoa Metropolis, Yenagoa Local Government Area, Bayelsa State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed awareness and implementation of COVID-19 Safety Protocols among selected fresh food marketers in Yenagoa Metropolis, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study determined the awareness of COVID-19 safety protocols among the fresh food marketers and ascertained the level of implementation of the COVID-19 safety protocols by the fresh food marketers. Data from One hundred and forty (140) randomly sampled fresh food marketers of meat, fish, fruits and vegetables were analyzed using descriptive statistics of percentage, mean score and rank expressed in table and bar chart. The results indicated high percentage awareness of 91.43% for fresh meat and fish marketers respectively and 97.14% respectively for vegetable and fruit marketers. The implementation of the safety protocols had mean score of agreement range of 3.19-4.14. Thirteen (13), representing 92.9%, were adequately implemented out of the fourteen (14) safety protocols. The wearing of face mask had a mean score of 4.14 (1st), followed by regular washing of hands with soap and water with mean of 4.10 (2nd), going to the hospital for test and check-up with mean of 3.83 (3rd), among others. Coughing and sneezing into the elbow recorded mean value of 2.80 (14th), which was undecided. The awareness and implementation of COVID-19 safety protocols were high. It was recommended that COVID-19 safety protocols' information dissemination should be sustained with multi-media and the frequency should not be compromised. Also, marketing organization and infrastructure should align with the new safety protocols to avert transmission.

KEYWORDS: Awareness, Implementation, COVID-19 Safety Protocol, Fresh Food Marketers, Yenagoa Metropolis.

I. INTRODUCTION

Food remains a basic need of man. Its availability, affordability, accessibility and usability remains central in the growth and development of the people of a nation. To this end, developed and developing nations alike, strive to sustain or attain food security; either by production or purchase. Indeed, being food secure at all times has been and still remains the greatest basic struggle confronting man. [1] agree that the world is still afflicted by hunger; having about 10% of her population food insecure. According to them, while some countries are unable to get enough food on daily basis, many others are living under the spectre of starvation. This unwholesome situation is a bane to development. Thus, [1] observed that this condition is worse in Africa, particularly with children in up to 20% Africa's nations; a higher percentage than elsewhere in the world.

[2] observed that the spate of global hunger, food and nutrition crises, malnutrition and poverty, occasioned by world politics, global economic meltdown/downturn, induced and natural disasters, global warming and climate changes among others, that seem to be pressing the world to a threshold, is far likely reaching a crescendo. The above scenario was further accentuated by the outbreak of the recent global pandemic of the dreadful disease of the novel Corona Virus, otherwise referred to as COVID-19 disease. The attendant devastation was unparalleled and the

consequences were unprecedented, especially with its perception as a hoax by the ignorant majority and the helplessness of the jetsam and flotsam of the society. This really pushed Africa to the edge, as already food insecure status and poverty ridden situation worsened. To this end, [1] reported that the potential impact of COVID-19 on African and global societies in the year 2021 has more concerning outlook because the world is facing famines driven by conflicts, aggravated by climate change and yet the COVID-19, driving human misery to a bewildering scale. Similarly, [3] stated that the COVID-19 pandemic crisis has had unprecedented effects on all dimensions of human life, and the full economic and social impacts are still unfolding, as the disease continues to spread around the world.

The COVID-19 reality dawned on many, when the world seemed to be brought to a standstill; with shut down of global economy, close down of nations' borders, lockdown of people of the world, skyrocketed death tolls of humans and emergence of new normal of physical/social distancing, regular hand washing with soap and water, use of face mask, among others, to check individual and community transmission of the disease. Whereas safe food buying and selling as well as eating should be considered important for man's nutrition, healthy life and living, the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic could have no little implication for human food and feeding. Thus, [4] stated that the lock-downs, shutdowns and imposition of curfews, necessitated to check the spread of COVID-19, have disturbed the food supply chains resulting in food shortages and price volatilities. Similarly, [1] expressed that the turmoil set in motion by the COVID-19 pandemic disrupts food supplies by driving smallholder farm families and communities into deeper worries and sufferings, and as well exposing the most vulnerable people - women and children, who work in the informal sectors such as agriculture and family, to experience catastrophic repercussions on their livelihoods and food security. Most family farmers do not have access to markets; which is an important determinant of economic development, as well as safe and sufficient/adequate food [5]. Furthermore, while poor trade facilitation constitutes a significant driver of food insecurity in Africa, the pandemic is interlinked with food systems in complex ways and the market proven to be an unreliable governor of food production, distribution, pricing, and consumption [5, 1].

According to [6], agricultural markets are central to agrarian transformation. Despite the seeming importance of marketing and markets,

Nigeria, Bayelsa State and Yenagoa Metropolis food markets in particular, remain largely unorganized; operating in open places where people in their numbers troop in and out for transactions, making body contacts inevitable and unavoidable. The practice runs contrary to the new normal of distancing and avoidance, among others to reduce the spread of the disease. This brings to question the traders' awareness of the of COVID - 19 safety protocols to checkmate spread and reduce havoc wrecked by the virus. Fresh food marketers in the context of this paper, are the retailers of fresh agricultural produce of food value. They transact with buyers who sometimes cluster around them. This gathering portends danger to the marketers and other buyers as it increases vulnerability to COVID - 19. The fresh food marketers of meat, fish, fruits and vegetables were selected for the study. They compose majority in the markets in Bayelsa State as the people often are concerned more with the food than other needs.

Again, with the seeming obvious subsistence of the virus, and man having to live with it, a paradigm shift to the new normal becomes necessary. Thus, among fresh food marketers, compliance and implementation of the safety protocols are 'sine qua non'. The question remains, is this the situation among fresh food marketers? This calls for worry as it holds serious implications for the future of the traders and their businesses. Currently, no empirical study exists on fresh food marketers' awareness and implementation of COVID-19 safety protocols, hence this study. This has occasioned knowledge gap. This work therefore, is considered timely and appropriate, as it seeks to close the seeming knowledge gap. The study among others is expected to add to the body of existing knowledge on COVID - 19 , especially with regard to food marketing. It will unravel benchmark data for policies, programmes and advocacy. Specifically therefore, this study sets out to determine the awareness of COVID-19 safety protocols among fresh food marketers and to ascertain the level of implementation of the COVID-19 safety protocols by food marketers in Yenagoa Metropolis, YELGA, Bayelsa state.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in the metropolis of Yenagoa Local Government Area (YELGA) of Bayelsa State. The Headquarters, Yenagoa, sited on the banks of Ekole Creek; a major river course making up the Niger Delta [7], houses the state capital. YELGA on the North and East, is bound by Rivers State, on the North -West,

by Kolokuma/Opokuma LGA, on the South, by Ogbia LGA and on the West by Southern Ijaw LGA. It has an area of 706 km², a population of 352,285 people and annual exponential growth rate of 2.9 (National Population Commission (NPC), 2006). This gives a population projection of 495,309 persons and population density of 706 persons/km² for YELGA in 2021. Her annual rainfall is about 2400mm with mean temperature of about 27°C and a vegetation characterized by mangrove forest, riparian forest and fresh water swamps, [8].

Crops such as water yam (*Dioscorea alata*), cassava (*Manihot spp.*), rice (*Oryza sativa*), potato (*Ipomea batatas*), plantain and banana (*Musa spp*) and vegetables grow abundantly in the area. Fish among other sea foods as well as snails and spices, among other forest products are natural endowments of the area.

The metropolis has seven (7) markets spread over seven communities. These include; Akenfa (Monday market), Tombia (Tuesday market), Agudama (Wednesday market), Igbogene (Thursday market), Opolo (Friday market), Kpansia (Saturday market) Swali (Monday/Thursday market). The markets enjoy

high concentration of marketing activities involving marketers from within and outside the state and also the predominance of fresh food marketers.

The seven markets were purposively sampled for the study. This was to ensure inclusiveness and representation of the diverse but unique traits of the various markets. A total of five (5) fresh food marketers each from meat, fish, fruits and vegetables were randomly drawn from each of the seven markets; using the marketers associations' lists. This gave a total of 140 respondents. A set of structured questionnaire was therefore administered to the One hundred and forty (140) fresh food marketers that composed the sample size. Also conducted was a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) on the marketers. Descriptive statistical tools of percentage, mean score and ranking were used to discuss the results; presented with chart and tables. The mean score was computed from a scale of Strongly Agree (SA = 5), Agree (A = 4), Undecided (U = 3), Disagree (D = 2) and Strongly Disagree (SD = 1) for the implementation of the safety protocols. The scores were interpreted as follows; SA = > 4.0, A = 3.1 - 4.0, U = 2.1 - 3.0, D = 1.1 - 2.0 and SD = < 1.0.

III. RESULTS/FINDINGS

AWARENESS OF COVID -19 SAFETY PROTOCOLS BY FRESH FOOD MARKETERS IN YENAGOA METROPOLIS, YELGA

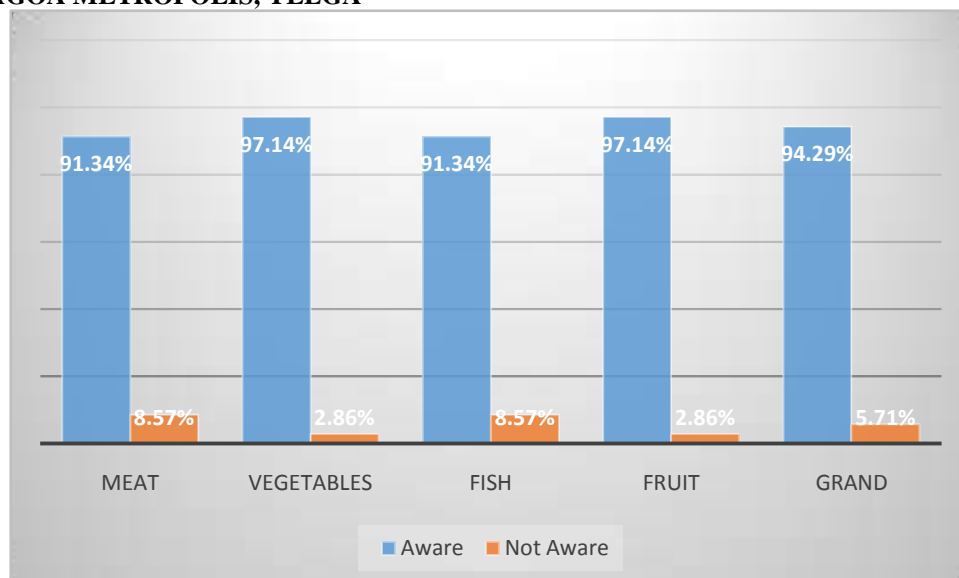


Figure 1. Percentage distribution of fresh food marketers by awareness of the COVID -19 safety protocols Source: Field survey data, 2021.

Results on awareness of COVID-19 safety protocols by fresh food marketers in Yenagoa Metropolis is presented in Figure 1. The result

shows that 91.43% respectively of the Meat and Fish marketers and 97.14% respectively of Vegetable and Fruit marketers in Yenagoa

Metropolis are aware of the COVID-19 safety protocols as opposed to 8.57% respectively of the Meat and Fish marketers and 2.86% respectively of the Vegetable and Fruit marketers in Yenagoa Metropolis that are not-aware of the COVID -19

safety protocols. An aggregate percentage of 94.29% for awareness and 5.71% non-awareness were obtained for the fresh food marketers in Yenagoa Metropolis.

Level of Implementation of Covid-19 Safety protocols

Table 1: Implementation of Covid-19 Safety protocols by fresh food marketers in Yenagoa Metropolis Markets.

Item	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Mean	Rank	Remark
Physical/social distancing	33 (23.57)	58 (41.43)	31 (22.14)	16 (11.43)	2 (1.43)	3.74	6 th	Agree
Wearing of face/nose Mask	60 (42.86)	50 (35.71)	22 (15.71)	6 (4.26)	2 (1.43)	4.14	1 st	Strongly Agree
Regular washing of hands with soap and water	56 (56.00)	49 (35.00)	30 (21.44)	4 (2.86)	1 (0.71)	4.10	2 nd	Strongly Agree
Use of hand sanitizer	36 (25.71)	24 (17.14)	64 (45.71)	10 (7.14)	6 (4.29)	3.53	9 th	Agree
Vaccination	26 (18.57)	27 (19.29)	53 (37.86)	24 (17.14)	10 (7.14)	3.25	12 th	Agree
Coughing/sneezing into elbow	44 (31.43)	47 (33.57)	30 (21.43)	10 (7.14)	9 (6.43)	3.76	5 th	Agree
Avoid crowd of over 50 persons	22 (15.71)	16 (11.43)	37 (26.43)	43 (30.71)	22 (16.43)	2.80	14 th	Undecided
Avoid touching surfaces in public areas	36 (25.71)	46 (32.86)	23 (16.43)	26 (18.57)	9 (6.43)	3.53	9 th	Agree
Avoid close contact with someone who is sick	26 (18.57)	34 (24.29)	36 (25.71)	28 (20.00)	16 (11.43)	3.19	13 th	Agree
Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth	36 (25.71)	48 (34.29)	16 (11.43)	27 (19.29)	13 (9.29)	3.48	11 th	Agree
Self-isolation when case is suspected	40 (28.57)	63 (45.00)	17 (12.14)	12 (8.57)	8 (5.71)	3.82	4 th	Agree
Staying indoors/observing lockdown in critical times	37 (26.43)	44 (31.43)	33 (23.57)	20 (14.29)	6 (4.29)	3.61	7 th	Agree
Alerting authorities of suspected cases	26 (18.57)	66 (47.14)	24 (17.14)	13 (9.29)	11 (7.86)	3.59	8 th	Agree
Going to the hospital for tests and checkup	33 (23.57)	71 (50.71)	18 (12.86)	15 (10.71)	3 (2.14)	3.83	3 rd	Agree

Figures in brackets/parentheses are percentage counts. Source: Field Survey Data, 2021.

The result in Table 1 above shows the implementation of Covid-19 safety protocols by fresh food marketers in Yenagoa Metropolis. From the table of fourteen (14) safety protocols, the fresh food marketers, Strongly Agreed with two (2), Agreed with implementing eleven (11) and were

undecided over one (1) of the protocols. These indicated variations in their compliance levels with the protocols. Wearing of face-mask (mean = 4.14) and regular washing of hands with soap and water (mean = 4.10) respectively ranked 1st and 2nd, and recorded strong agreement among the food

marketers in the implementation of the safety protocols. These were followed by protocols of going to the hospital for test and check up with a mean of 3.83. Also, the protocol of self isolation when case is suspected, ranked 4th with a mean of 3.82. The protocol of coughing and sneezing into the elbow with mean of 3.76 ranked 5th. The observance of physical and social distancing ranked 6th with a mean score of 3.74. The protocols; staying indoors/ observing lockdown in critical times, alerting authorities of suspected cases and avoiding touching surfaces in public areas had mean scores of 3.61, 3.59 and 3.53, ranked 7th, 8th and 9th respectively with the marketers agreeing to complying with them. Also, 3.53 mean score was recorded by the marketers for agreeing with the use of hand sanitizer, which also ranked 9th. Whereas avoiding touching the eyes, nose and mouth and vaccination had mean scores of 3.48 and 3.25 to rank 11th and 12th respectively, avoiding close contact with someone who is sick and avoiding crowd of over 50 persons had mean scores of 3.19 and 2.80 respectively to rank 13th and 14th. However, the rating for avoiding crowd of over 50 persons, was undecided by the marketers. Generally, the responses were spread among strongly agree, agree and undecided.

IV. DISCUSSION

AWARENESS OF THE COVID –19 SAFETY PROTOCOLS BY FRESHFOOD MARKETERS IN YENAGOA METROPOLIS

The result on the awareness of COVID-19 safety protocol is quite impressive. This could be consequent upon the unprecedented education, sensitization and publicity by individuals, Government and Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The effort of the Nigerian Center for Disease Control (NCDC) is notable; giving updates on casualties, emphasizing observance of safety protocols as well as enforcing policies aimed at compliance. The roles of the media; through text messages on safety awareness, publications and adverts are commendable. The religious bodies, health and other organized groups, etc were not left out. On further probes through Focus Group Discussion (FGD), the major areas of awareness included social and physical distancing, use of face masks, avoidance of crowd, regular hand wash with soap and water, use of hand sanitizers, vaccination, among others. About 85% of the marketers noted that the use of diverse media influenced their awareness. The result signals that Yenagoa Metropolis fresh food marketers are likely to be implementing the COVID-19 safety protocol since

they are highly aware of them and probably know the implications.

LEVEL OF OF IMPLEMENTATION OF COVID-19 SAFETY PROTOCOLS

A total of thirteen (13) safety protocols out of the fourteen (14) listed were identified as being complied with by the marketers, representing 92.9%. Out of these, only two (2) protocols representing 14.29% were strongly agreed to by the Yenagoa Metropolis fresh food marketers as implemented by them. Again, eleven (11) protocols representing 78.57% were agreed to as implemented by the fresh food marketers in Yenagoa Metropolis. The remaining 7.14%, one (1) item, out of the listed safety protocols, recorded undecided among the fresh food marketers in Yenagoa Metropolis in the implementation.

It is worthy to note that the high levels of agreement with the implementation of the safety protocols, as indicated with thirteen (13) items was not unexpected. Referring to Figure 1 on the awareness of the safety protocols, the awareness was overwhelming among the fresh food marketers. This could entail that they understood as well the implications of not being compliant. Awareness, especially with robust information, could engender passing through more rapidly the adoption process to use. This probably was exemplified by the marketers.

The daily report of infection and death occasioned by COVID-19 as recorded by countries of the world and the states in Nigeria by NCDC, may have exacerbated fear and cowed the marketers into the consciousness of implementation of the safety protocols. It was a matter of life and death! Again, the roles of several safety protocols committees and law enforcement agencies, towards compliance could also have been inspirational.

As against the permutation of many that vulnerability will be more among African nations, with unimaginable death tolls, it turned out otherwise. The speculations were based on Africa's precarious situations of poverty, hunger, conflicts, climate change effects, among others. [5] described sub-Saharan Africa as the home of the world's poorest countries. On probing the marketers further on the reason(s) for their high compliance, about 84% indicated the use of several media and the high frequency of use.

The above result has serious implication for the future. The place of multi-media use in health campaigns should not be over-emphasized. At critical moments, such as pandemics, several print, electronic and social media should be engaged for complementary information

dissemination and the frequency should not be miserly. On the undecided position for avoiding crowds of over 50 persons, it could be that the marketers felt the protocol was an infringement on their social lives. The people of Bayelsa State are jolly and they enjoy companionship, thus the protocol could have been seen as having tendency of whittling down their relationships, and invariably their pleasure. It calls for increased education and sensitization, as men would only engage in social activities while alive and healthy. Also possible is the difficulty of managing crowds in poorly organized markets. The poor organization could be the consequence of poor market infrastructural development. This also implies that market infrastructure should be developed in such a manner as to prevent unnecessary clustering during transaction, yet giving every buyer the opportunity to be attended to.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The overwhelming awareness of COVID-19 safety protocols by 94.29% of the fresh food marketers in Yenagoa Metropolis was wholesome. Also, the high level of implementation cum compliance by the fresh food marketers portends hope for the future handling of pandemics. In as much as the enlightenment campaigns were adjudged to have increased the marketers' awareness, the tempo should be sustained. This should involve complementary roles by multimedia and the frequency should not be compromised. Market organization and infrastructure should align with the "new normal" trends occasioned by COVID-19. It should no longer be business as usual!

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