

# The Trauma of Covid-19 Pandemic in Nigeria Secondary School Education: The Role of Counselor

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**Abstract** – The impact of COVID-19 on secondary school education is deemphasized. Worse is the damage impose on mental health especially, traumatic experience of students. However, the present study assessed the trauma of COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria secondary school education and the role of counselor. The study raised issues on current status of COVID-19 in Nigeria and on the globe. The origin of COVID-19 generally and in Nigeria specifically, has been examined. Having explored the trauma associated with COVID-19, and the effects on secondary school students, the question of □what then is the role of school counselors in combating COVID-19 trauma is addressed. The study concluded that school counselors have greater functions to implement on reducing trauma posed by COVID-19 among secondary school students. Recommendations were made with specific implications to students, teachers, school leaders, parents, and government at large.

**Keywords** – Disruptive thinking, social entrepreneurship, social innovation

## INTRODUCTION

The current underdevelopment in the education sector in developing countries including Nigeria has been further heightened due to global outbreak of the novel COVID-19 disease. Ever since the pandemic, the spread of novel Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) in Nigeria continues to record increases as the latest statistics provided by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control as of 25th September, 2020 revealed that Nigeria has 58,062 confirmed cases, and 1,103 deaths have been recorded in 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. Social distancing has been identified as a crucial step to reduce the spread of COVID-19. This has affected many facets of life and the education experience of the stakeholders. The social support and interaction which is essential for our wellbeing [1]. and education engagement has been distorted. In fact, the new normal in all levels of education (primary, secondary, and tertiary) in Nigeria such as physical, social, and behavioural responses of teachers and students are a mirage.

More so, the physical distancing [2] and social spacing which are potential detriments to education success have been highlighted as appropriate for combating the pandemic. Obviously, COVID-19 has changed life (from physical or social distancing to regular hand washing and wearing masks) of students and teachers, and physical health and wellness as well as the way their daily habits have also changed. Further, most of these life changing patterns among students and teachers have likely been the critical issue of mental

health, likely leading to serious challenges related to trauma, depression, anxiety and emotional exhaustion.

All these aforementioned psychopathological factors are academic risk factors tending to spark out trauma. Sushmita, and Smita [3] explored the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on tertiary education in Bangladesh through the students' perspectives. In their study, numerous unprecedented disruptions in teaching and students learning, low motivation, length of study hours, and various physical, mental, and economic problems regarding academic studies were prominently found due to the spread of the virus at the global level. The education limited the innovative approach due to unavailability of electronic devices. More so, limited access to the internet, high cost of internet, low speed of internet, and difficulties in using online platforms were also perceived as bottleneck to education during the COVID-19 pandemic. In secondary school education, students learn best in an atmosphere free of disruptions in students learning, high motivation and suitable learning durations. Learning is highly attained when physical, mental, and economic challenges regarding academic studies are sub-optimal, and when educational facilities are available and accessible. But when all these forces and factors are not controlled and enhanced for optimal performance amidst COVID-19, students may be subjected to traumatic experiences.

During the period of COVID-19 pandemic, a study was conducted on 2,700 people included a majority from the United State (35% of the sample), in addition to people in the UK, France, Germany, Singapore,

Australia and New Zealand where people faced the trauma of high level of stress, greater anxiety, day to day sadness, emotional exhausted, and overall mental health declined [4]. In addition, there was human toll, mental health complications which also have implications for work commitment and decreased productivity due to low level of accomplishment of assigned tasks, inadequate critical and creative thinking, procrastinate challenging work and have difficulty juggling tasks and responsibilities. It was observed by the author that, most people were associated with traumatic experiences of different kinds. Although, the study did not indicate the category of participants, how many students and at what level of education, it is obvious that secondary school students and staffs may grossly experience trauma during this period of pandemic and possibly posttraumatic challenges.

The resulting effects of COVID-19 pandemic on secondary school education is not farfetched. Considering the life transformation to the new normal, the learning experiences in terms of curriculum and extracurricular activities, learning hours, pattern and methods of instruction will definitely have to change. These series of changes and the novel encounter by the students and teachers are what will constitute trauma among secondary school students. COVID-19 pandemic-related has led to shutdowns of educational institutions, and in the hostels were sent back home so as to reduce the chance of transmission in the dormitory settings, face-to-face classes were on online for teaching to avoid overcrowded classrooms.

It should also be noted that health care personal was unavailable due to the shutdown of student health centers. Students enduring life became unpredictable, hopeless, stressful, and difficulty in adjusting to the ambiguity and unpredictable COVID-19 pandemic crises [5]. However, giving cognizance to all these negative impacts incur on students, the question is, what is the role of school counselors in combatting the traumatic experience of secondary school students?

### **Origin of COVID 19**

The origin of COVID-19 is not far away from now (during the period of this study). In late December 2019, patients in Wuhan, China, reported having viral pneumonia due to an unknown microbial pathogen. This prompted scientists and medical professionals into in-depth scientific search about the epistemology of the disease. The scientists therefore admit that the diseases are significantly differ from Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome SARS. That is, an infectious diseases that have become one of the major threats to global public health

in the twenty-first century [6]. A new coronavirus was therefore identified as the pathogen and was temporarily named after the 2019.

In January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) exposed the emergence of a new virus (COVID-19) and thereby become public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC), because the diseases are one of the fastest spreading infections that consume the world within the shortest possible time.

In February 18, 2020, 57,805 people have been confirmed to be infected and died of COVID-19, especially in mainland China (National Health Commission of the People's Republic of China (2020). The outbreak of COVID-19 in China had caused global public panic, mental health stress, and anxiety due to the increasing number of cases being diagnosed at the global level [7]. According to the Center for Disease Control (NCDC), symptoms of the disease include: fever, cough, running nose, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell, and/or shortness of breath appear within 14 days after being exposed to the disease.

Here in Nigeria, COVID-19 was introduced by an Italian. It was February, 2020 when the world was just waking up to the realities of Covid-19, Dr. Amarachukwu Allison examined the Italian patient who walked into her consulting room in Ogun state. She noticed with his complaints, he had a fever, it was high grade, headache, muscle pain and fatigue, which later in addition to history taken discovered to be COVID-19 complication. Contact tracing revealed that some people who had contact with him were confirmed positive to the disease. Subsequent, some people coming from countries with high infection later discovered to have come in with the disease. As of the period of this article, over 33, 278, 488 million people have been infected and over 1, 000, 825 deaths recorded globally. Over 58, 460 persons have been affected in Nigeria with over 1, 111 deaths.

### **COVID-19 Pandemic and Trauma of Secondary School Students in Nigeria**

Trauma as defined by American Psychological Association (APA) is a psychological and emotional response to a terrible event like accident, rape, or natural and social disaster which occur in a particular environment (Leonard, [8]. However, a secondary school student nasty experienced trauma because of his exposure to events find physically or emotionally threatening or harmful to life and prosperity. COVID-19 exposure is a very good example. It should be noted to note that traumatized secondary school student can feel a range of emotional responses both immediately after the event, depending on the nature of events or situations.

The traumatic nature of students is overwhelming, helpless, shocked, or have difficulty processing their academic life experiences.

Trauma students do have emotional, social, and physical symptoms. Also, person who has experienced socio-emotional trauma may feel denial, anger, fear, sadness, shame, confusion, anxiety, depression, numbness, guilt, hopelessness, irritability, and difficulty concentrating, as well as emotional outbursts. They may experience difficulty in coping with feeling a situation, flashbacks, and nightmares. Furthermore, trauma also cause physical symptoms, such as: headaches, digestive symptoms, fatigue, racing heart, sweating, and feeling jumpy, hyper arousal, and difficulty to sleep.

No doubt, changing in events and pattern of life as a result of COVID-19 is itself can cause traumatic experience among secondary school students. Families across the country are adapting to the evolving changes in daily life caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Most schools, places of public gathering, and businesses are closed, and parents and other caregivers are faced with helping the children adjust to the new life. This includes trying to keep children occupied, feeling safe, and attempting to keep up with schoolwork as best as possible. None of this is easy, but it helps to stay focused on what is possible in order to reinforce a sense of control and to reassure students that they can cope, and that the situation will get better soon.

It is highly possible that trauma during an infectious disease outbreak can sometimes cause the following: fear and worry about your own health and the health of your loved ones, your financial situation or job, or loss of support services you rely on; changes in sleep or eating patterns; difficulty sleeping or concentrating; chronic health problems; worsening of mental health conditions; increased use of tobacco and or alcohol and other substances. It can also lead to irritability, aggressiveness, clinginess, school avoidance, and withdrawal from activities and friends. Others include: sleeping and eating disturbances; agitation; increase in conflicts; physical complaints; delinquent behaviour; and poor concentration [9].

Many studies have demonstrated the impact of infectious disease outbreaks on public mental health, such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2003, [10], and the 2009 novel influenza A (H1N1) epidemic [11]. These types of epidemics may expose secondary school students to experience psychological problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder, psychological distress, depression and anxiety. Also, Liang, et al [12] assessed the youth mental health after the coronavirus disease 19 (COVID-19) occurred in

China two weeks later, and then investigated factors of mental health among youth groups. The results suggest that nearly 40.4% the sampled youths were found to be prone to psychological problems and 14.4% with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms. This is a clear indication that secondary school students are not escapees from these traumatic experiences, hence every one of them face reality of COVID-19 pandemic.

### **The Role of Counselors in Reducing COVID-19 Traumatic Experience among Nigeria Secondary School Students**

Relative to COVID-19 traumatic encounter in secondary school education, school counselors and psychologists have greater role to play.

**Adaptability role:** School counsellors need to encourage the students to accept and adapt to understand himself and adapt to the traumatic experience situation and the life producing challenges of the disease. Through adaptability role, individual students will be able to adjust their thoughts, actions, and emotions in order to effectively navigate new, changing, or uncertain situations brought about COVID-19 pandemic to the education sector.

**Imaginative role:** Counselors make students respond to the changing needs of learning throughout a lesson, and manage unexpected situations relates to student behaviour, by seeking out and support any technical needs and development for effective teaching.

**Counselling role** is expected to focus on encouraging autonomous teaching and learning. It should be noted that when teachers perceived their school leaders to be more autonomy-supportive, teachers report more positive relationships with students and colleagues and greater adaptability, greater work-related wellbeing and lower emotional exhaustion [13].

**Advisory role:** When counselors advise students and teachers on autonomous learning including decision making or taking, especially in this period of COVID-19, schooling become easy to students. Trauma through COVID-19 is widespread, but students must know that trauma or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) does not have to be an automatic outcome. It is also possible for students to achieve post-traumatic growth. Traumatic growth can enhance secondary school students' appreciation for existence; practice of enhanced relationships with others; perceiving and utilizing an expanded possibility; and then increasing personal strength and spiritual growth.

Counselors guide students on health matters in school especially, issues relating to COVID-19. Students

should know that their discussion about COVID-19 can increase or decrease their level of anxiety. Students should be reminded that their school is healthy and safe with COVID-19 guidelines compliance. Counselors are to do everything within their power to keep students feel loved, safety and sound. They are requiring to carefully listen to students or have them understand action for their thoughts and feelings and respond with truth and reassurance.

It is also not duty-bound for school counselors to explain social distancing to students. Children may probably do not fully understand why parents or guardians are not allowing them to be with friends. Tell students that their family is following the guidelines of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) against COVID-19, which include social or physical distancing. Explain that while we do not know how long it will take to eradicate the disease, and to treat the number of those infected. It is a critical time and compulsory compliance to the COVID-19 guidelines as strategized by health experts, work well to keep the spread to the barest minimum.

Counselors can counsel students to stay focus on the positivity. Ask students to appreciate having more time to spend as a family member. Utilize the time well on books and make it as fun as possible. Engage in family and school works. Student can be counseled to learn that they can be amused by singing, laughing, as well as connecting with nature and get needed exercise. Counsellor can also encourage children to connect with their friends and school mates virtually.

Counselors should encourage students to establish and maintain a daily life routine. This is because a sense of control, predictability, calm, and well-being are managed by keeping a regular schedule. It will also help students respect others' personal needs when they connect with friends and school mates virtually.

Counselors can also enable students see the need to identify, analyze, and discuss issues affecting their personal and academic life in more depth. Refer them to appropriate sources of COVID-19 facts. Provide honest, accurate, and factual information about the current status of COVID-19. Counselling can also be expanded to expose students to decision-making about school and family plans and scheduling.

## Conclusion

Mental health is critically important for individuals, schools, and for society as a whole. While COVID-19 are traumatic times, it is needful to know that such times do not have to be damaging. This study has examined origin of COVID-19, trauma cause by the

disease and the damages it can incur on students, and thus, concluded that withstanding the traumatic experience depend on each individual's level of resilience. Therefore, every student, parents, school staff, and other stakeholders in the education sector should get educated about COVID-19 pandemic, and then focus on helping others. Above all, school counselors have the magnitude roles to be focus on their greater purpose and establish predictable routines of their task concerning COVID-19. In addition, they are to stay connect to students, their parents, and be advisory to their wellbeing. They are to focus on posttraumatic growth of students. They must pay attention to mental health and help themselves and each student to be as mentally healthy as possible.

## Recommendations

Based on the analysis, discussion and facts findings in this study, the following recommendations are made: Students on their part should take advantage of the many palliatives offer by the government, private individuals, and schools. There should be community school relation for the benefit of the online platforms currently offering free learning opportunities for the students in their various schools. The parents should devise means to connect with school staff while at home. School authority should help students stay connected to school, by assisting students locate learning resources. Through which, the student's capacity for virtual learning experiences will be greatly built. It also important that schools should provide lessons and learning activities for children to do through online education. Public health education campaign should be built for the benefit of students. the education will inform students that COVID-19 pandemic is a disease that spreads among people who are in close contact with one another, when an infected person coughs or sneezes, or when one touches infected objects or surfaces. Teachers should read widely about COVID-19, attend workshops concerning the disease to be acquainted with the epistemology of the disease. They should always remind students at every lesson about the signs and symptoms of COVID-19, which include: fever, cough, sore throat, and/or shortness of breath appear within 14 days after being exposed to the disease among many. They should encourage students to practice daily good hygiene. Encourage students to practice these simple steps to prevent spreading the virus: wash your hands multiple times a day for 20 seconds; avoid crowd; maintain physical distancing; and wear face mask in public places. Parents or guardians should reach out to children's teacher and other relevant school staff to show

concerns about their coping and keeping up with assignments or activities. They should monitor television, internet, and social media viewing - both for themselves and their children. For example, watching continual updates on COVID-19 may increase fear and anxiety among the students. It should be noted that inappropriate information for students can also cause anxiety or confusion, particularly. Government (policy makers) should play a powerful role in supporting students and teachers. They should promote empowerment and self-initiation among students and teachers. They should be acknowledging and attempting to understand issues from students and teachers' perspectives, such as providing them opportunities to voice the difficulties and the opportunities emanating from classroom activities tutoring during COVID-19 pandemics. Curriculum developer should focus on seeking students and teachers' input in decision-making at the school-level, such as asking them how best to approach different events and tasks scheduled during the COVID-19 pandemic. The general public should dispel rumors and inaccurate information as much as possible. People should know that many stories about COVID-19 on the internet may include rumors and inaccurate information.

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