

OLDER ADULTS IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ERA: A REVIEW OF THE HEALTH CHALLENGES AND PREVENTIVE MEASURES

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ABSTRACT

The outbreak of COVID-19 is an era that changed the routine of everyone and also to a greater extent disproportionately affected the older adults. This pandemic era affected the older adults mentally and physically, thereby making them most vulnerable to the COVID-19 disease. Most of the older adults during the pandemic era experienced discrimination, suffered anxiety, panic, adjustment disorder, depression chronic stress and insomnia. Some of these health problems were brought about due to the occurrence of immunosenescence that is age related remodeling of the immune system. Many older adults could no longer access the health care facilities due to lockdown order. The older adults suffered also from social isolation and loneliness caused by social distancing as a measure of controlling the spread of the disease. The measures taken to contain the virus were the major risk factors that have been linked with poor physical and mental health status, increased blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, diminished immune system functioning, depression, anxiety, poorer cognitive functioning, increased Alzheimer's disease and mortality. So many recommendations were made by both World Health Organization and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on the need for older adults to get vaccinated, frequent washing of hands, adequate nutrition, maintaining their medication and keeping good communication link with families and friends as a way of managing the challenges and impact of COVID-19 pandemic era.

Keywords: Older, Adults, Covid-19, Health ,Challenges, Preventive and Measures

Introduction

Corona virus also known as COVID – 19 is a pandemic meaning the outbreak of a disease known as COVID-19 which spreads across many countries, of which Nigeria is one of them. The outbreak of such disease could affect a large number of people and could also result to loss of lives (Jennifer, 2020). World Health Organization (WHO) therefore, declared corona virus disease which is caused by corona virus SARS-CoV-2 to be a pandemic when it was so clear that the illness was serious and spread quickly over a wide area within the shortest possible time. WHO has also, declared COVID-19 a disease of public health concern.

According to WHO (2021), Corona virus is an infectious disease and most people infected with the disease may experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without any special treatment. COVID-19 virus spreads primarily through droplets of saliva or discharges from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Apparently, because of the nature of the disease, older adults and those of them experiencing underlying medical issues like cardiovascular disease, diabetes chronic respiratory diseases, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illnesses. Alicia (2021) stated that for COVID-19, older adults are most vulnerable to severe illness. Alicia (2021) stated that older adults 60 and older especially, those of them with already existing medical issues such as heart disease, diabetes or cancer are more likely to suffer even deadly corona virus infection than other age group.

According to WHO (2021), the pandemic era of COVID-19 has changed the daily routines of most older adults some of these changes affected their care receiving routines, support by other people, their social lives and most importantly how people relate with them. The older adults most of the time are now expected to stay more at home, lack physical contact with other people such as family members, friends and colleagues some suffered temporary to permanent loss of job and other activities. Due to the fact that they have been pronounced as most vulnerable, they now suffer anxiety and fear which resulted in the loss of life of many older adult during the pandemic era. (WHO,2021).

According to Gabriel, Timothy, Emmanuel, Sarah and Yusuff (2020), there are quite a number of reasons why the older adults are significantly affected by COVID-19 in the pandemic era which includes physiological changes related to maturity and ageing, reduced immune system ability, and multi morbidity. According Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) (2021), they stated that the current COVID-19 pandemics era has disproportionately affected older adults. Also the pandemic era requires us to change how we treat and respond to older adults needs especially now in the pandemic era. PAHO (2021) also listed some of the areas of emphasis which includes the needs and vulnerabilities that older persons have when it comes to their right to health; seen the highest mortality rates in older adult with co- morbidities and with functional decline; and exposed the fragility of health systems to support older adults and consider their unique needs among others.

Fabio et.al (2020), stated that the older adults may represents a specific cluster of high – risk patients for developing COVID -19 with rapidly progressive clinical deterioration. Fabio et.al (2020), also stated that in older adults, immunosensescence and co morbid disorders are mostly likely to promote viral- induced cytokine storm resulting in life threatening respiratory failure and multisystem involvement. According to Gabriel et.al (2020), also stated that there are other contributory factors that can lead to an increased

rate or effect of COVID-19 disease among the older adults and therefore, increased disease manifestation and mortality and it is immunosenescence which must have occurred in a lot of the older adults. Immunosenescence according to Gabriel et.al (2020), is an age-related remodeling of the immune system that can affect and decrease immune functions.

Medical News Today (2021), stated that according to World Health Organization (2020), that more than ninety –five percent of COVID-19deaths were among people over sixty years of age and more than half of all deaths occurred in people of eighty years –plus. The Chinese centers for Disease Control and Prevention offered data in March showing an average COVID-19 case fatality rate of 3.6 percent for adults in their sixties, eighty percent for those in their seventies and 14.8 percent for people eighty years and above.

Allison, Francine, Maureen and Rachel (2021), stated that some of the challenges of the older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic era according to their study that more than seventy of the participants in the study reported adhering to physical distancing behaviours, and the most frequently appraised challenges were constraints on social interactions (42.4%) and restrictions on a activity (30.9%). In a study conducted by Ipsit, Dilip, Charles and Reynolds (2020), stated that among the 895 participants aged 45 through 64years, 16. 1% reported anxiety disorder; 14.4 percent reported depressive disorder. Debanja (2020), stated that the pandemic era have significant psychosocial impact such as health anxiety, panic, adjustment disorders, depression, chronic stress and insomnia.

Debanja (2020), also Stated that social distancing which is a major strategy to fight COVID-19 was also a major cause of loneliness particularly in settings like nursing- care or old-age homes which is an independent risk factor for depression, anxiety disorders and suicide. During the pandemic era, older adults also experienced discrimination and lack of health care utilization which in turn contributes to their poor care during the COVID-19 pandemic era.

According to Eqbal, Afnan, and Walaa (2021), on their study of challenges facing older adults during the COVID-19 outbreak, they outlined that preventive measures to COVID-19 was one of the challenges which included quarantine, distance, spatial and social isolation, community action and routine activities. Also misinformation was among the challenges including unreliable information, fake rumors, conspiracy theories, complex and incomprehensible information. For the older adult's wellbeing, mental health disorder, depression anxiety, panic and fear, stress and low immune system and socio- economic sufferance were the major poor well-being among older adults. The older adults were also affected by limitation in access to nutritional needs like; disruption of food supply or short supply of adequate necessary materials, malnutrition, consuming non- healthy foods and impairing of the community system against viruses. Violence was also among the

challenges experienced by the older adults during the pandemic era which are discrimination towards people due to their age and gender inequalities (gender – based violence).

Also in a study conducted by Sepulveda, Rodriguez, Perez et.al (2020), the study reported that the older adults had anxiety, depression, poor sleep quality, and physical inactivity during the pandemic era and recommended that cognitive strategies and increasing physical levels using applications, online videos, telehealth, are the main international recommendation. According to Subuj, Mehrab, Farhana, Uday and Mark (2021), they emphasized that fear was one of the challenges faced by older adults during the pandemics era. Subul et. al (2021), also stated that older adults who felt isolated from family and friends and older adults whose relatives or friends were diagnosed with COVID-19 were more fearful. Bei (2020), stated that social isolation and loneliness was among the challenges of the older adults during the pandemic era because there were no family visitation for older adults staying alone, community services and programmes such as adults day-care, respite care, homemakers, meals on wheels and home health services were not achievable due to the lockdown and fear of contracting the COVID-19 disease. Also this social isolation and loneliness were the major risk factor that have been linked with poor physical and mental health status, increased blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, diminished immune system functioning, depression, anxiety, poorer cognitive functioning, increased risk of Alzheimer's disease, and mortality.

Rana, Beatrix and Reshina (2021), also identified delayed health consequence as one of the challenges faced by older adults during the pandemic era. Rana et. al (2021), noted that the delayed diagnoses affected the older adults who had existing health conditions and these group of people were already vulnerable before the lockdown and became more vulnerable during the pandemic era. Smrit and Mandhusudan (2020), stated that older adults working as healthcare personnel in frontline got infected and died during the pandemic era. So many and more were the challenges faced by older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic era which led to the loss of life of many senior citizens all over the world. Though, just like the challenges arouse, so many measures were taking to help reduce the effects of the pandemic on the older adults some of them include;

COVID-19, Older Adults and Preventive Measures

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2021), older adults who are mostly at risk should try and get vaccinated as soon as possible, wearing a face mask, washing of hands with soap and water and if soap is not available, make use of hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol. The older adults should try not to touch the various openings of their body without properly washing their hands afterwards. Older adults are also expected to cover their mouths while coughing and sneezing either with tissue or their elbow and should constantly disinfect the surfaces and things or areas touched frequently. Chhetri, Chan, Arai, Chul, Sriyani and Setiati (2020), stated some

guidelines from the international Association for Gerontology and Geriatrics (IAGG)Asia/Oceania Region this includes; getting adequate sleep, been optimistic (emotion to prevent depression), vigor (active exercise indoor), adequate nutrition and maintaining good oral hygiene, social support and social contacts through communication technology with family and friends, using ones routine drugs, getting sunlight in the morning and using the emergency services.

Missouri Department of Health & senior Services (MDHSS) (2021), also suggested staying six feet away from others, avoiding crowds and poorly ventilated spaces and the older adults monitoring their health daily. Medical News Today (2021), suggested that older Adults should avoid sharing personal items such as cups and towels and use a face covering in public and anywhere it is difficult to stay six feet away from others. A test is advised if symptoms appear and take appropriate precautions if the result is positive to COVID-19.

Conclusion

COVID-19 pandemic era has no doubt changed the daily routines of the older adults, thereby exposing them to so many challenges and health problems especially those who have already existing health issues. Some of the challenges which are health related are; anxiety, depression, panic, adjustment disorder, chronic stress and insomnia. Some of them are faced with fear and death. Some have to lose their jobs because of the situation. It is also assumed that this could be as a result of immunosenescence, lockdown and distancing making them most of the time isolated and having to stay indoors. These challenges faced by older adults has made various health organizations like World Health Organization, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and so many others to outline some preventive guideline for older adults to follow some of them are; proper washing of hands, putting on a face mask, keeping opening communication network with family and friends and getting vaccinated

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