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EPIDEMIC OUTBREAK AND SAFETY PROTOCOLS ON WELFARE OF PERSONS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN SOUTH-WEST, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: This paper investigated epidemic outbreak and safety protocols on welfare of persons with special needs in South-west, Nigeria. It establishes that welfare of persons with special needs faces neglect and nonchalant attitude of the society, especially during epidemic outbreak.

Purpose of the study: This paper investigated epidemic outbreak and safety protocols on welfare of persons with special needs in South-west, Nigeria.

Methodology: A descriptive survey research design was adopted and three research questions were raised for the study. The sample consists of five hundred (500) randomly selected respondents with special needs in South-west, Nigeria. The data were analysed using Multiple Regression Analysis, ANOVA and PPMC. A questionnaire titled "epidemic outbreak, safety protocols, and welfare of persons with special needs" with thirty items was used. It is on a four likert scales of Strongly Agree (AS), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) with three sections, apart from demographic variables: epidemic outbreak (10-items), safety protocols (10-items), and welfare (10-items). It was validated by experts in the fields of special education and social work and it has reliability level of $r=0.75$.

Results: Results indicated positive and highly significant correlation between welfare and outbreak ($r = 0.429$, $p < 0.01$) which underscores the relatedness of safety protocol adherence, epidemic response, and improved welfare for persons with special needs in South-west Nigeria

Conclusion and Recommendations: This study highlights influence of welfare in promoting safety protocols adherence among individuals with special needs during epidemic outbreak. The study recommended that welfare of persons with special needs should be given serious attention in South-west, Nigeria.

Keywords: Epidemic outbreak, persons with special needs, safety protocols, welfare



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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Persons with special needs and their caregivers would benefit enormously from this study because the findings of this study revealed that the welfare of persons with special needs promotes safety protocols adherence and overall well-being among individuals with special needs during epidemic outbreak. The findings will act as eye opener for parents, caregivers, well-meaning individuals, non-governmental organization, and governmental organizations to support the welfare of persons with special needs and to promote the safety protocols among persons with special needs, especially before, during, and after the epidemic outbreak.

INTRODUCTION

Persons with special needs welfare is the live wire through which they navigate the world that leads to fulfilment of their existence in this competitive human world. Therefore, welfare of persons with special needs is not what can be taken for granted, rather it should be seen by all as a project that the whole members of society should invest in. Onalu, and Nwafor (2021) stated that welfare as a concept helps to reduce psychological stress, enhance the quality of life and help to achieve social attachment. Lack of welfare on the other hand, increases the risk of depression, social marginalisation, maladaptive behaviours and high rate of mortality. Examining how important the welfare of persons with special needs is, Tjahjanti, Sumarmi, and Widodo (2018) specified that welfare for special needs community should start from the environment of disability right from childhood. The above authors further mentioned that increasing welfare for individuals with special needs in society among others must be understood as the persons with special needs require recognition of their existence as individuals and social beings who have capabilities and potential that is not much different from assumed normal people.

The persons with special needs also need recognition and acceptance of parents, families and communities. This is because life quality has become one of those familiar phrases that is seen and heard frequently, at the personal level which is common in professional conversations on the quality of life. Indeed, meeting the welfare needs of persons with special needs is one of the most critical problems facing the world today (Phillips, 2006). Similarly, no doubt the welfare of persons with special needs

are faced with lots of challenges. In spite of this Sultan, Malik, and Atta (2016) study showed that quality of welfare of persons with special needs could be improved by adequate social welfare. However, traditional special needs-related social welfare schemes have mainly focused on poverty alleviation rather than taking into account specific challenges faced by persons with special needs; particularly active participation in education, access to health and employment (Social Protection Human Rights, 2015). According to Saran, White, and Kuper (2019), a key issue in attaining welfare for persons with special needs is to balance social and economic opportunities from both charitable and economic standpoints. From a charitable viewpoint, it is to secure basic human rights for persons with needs. From an economic standpoint, it is expected to increase the human capital of individuals with special needs, and thus enable them to reduce their dependence on income transfers and other forms of public support.

Regardless of this, and other international directives to support the rights of persons with special needs to participate in society and live with dignity, and countries' responsibilities in relation to them, persons with special needs experience significant unmet support needs (Vásquez, et al., 2021; Berthé, et al., 2013) predominantly in low- and middle-income countries. In these locales, formal community welfare support services for persons with special needs are under-developed, under-resourced, or do not exist, leaving persons with special needs to rely primarily on family members to have their needs met (Vasquez, 2021; United Nations, 2006).

Earlier methods of addressing benefits for persons with disabilities have revealed inadequate progress in overcoming the deeply-rooted social structures and practices that hinder opportunities for persons with special needs (Social Protection Human Rights, 2015). Barnes (2012) stated that there is a wealth of evidence that persons with special needs experience far higher levels of unemployment and underemployment than non-disabled peers. Up till now sociologists have paid limited attention to the structural causes of this issue. Whilst there has been some improvement in the employment situation for individuals with special needs in some parts of the world, in most countries unemployment, poverty and dependence are common experiences for the overwhelming majority of people with special needs (Barron & Ncube, 2011). These are the normal experience of person with special needs, which become compounded during the epidemic outbreak.

Epidemic is an infection which affects or tends to affect an inexplicably large number of individuals within a population, community, or region at the same time and is infectious (Merriam-Webster, 2024). An outbreak is a sudden rise in the number of cases of a disease more than normal expectancy in a community or geographical location. An outbreak can be declared an epidemic when the disease spreads rapidly to many people (American Lung Association, 2022). Thus, the terms describe various degrees of an infectious disease's spread. The process begins with an outbreak and a sudden rise in the presence of an infection. An outbreak is consequently an incident that cannot be stopped or slowed, through which disease spreads rapidly to many people within a localized community or region (such as a single country) (Merriam-Webster, 2024).

As well, an epidemic outbreak is the occurrence of cases of disease in excess of what would normally be expected in a defined community, geographical area or season. The number of cases varies according to the disease-causing agent, and the size and type of previous and existing exposure to the

agent. Outbreaks are maintained by infectious agents that spread directly from person to person, from exposure to an animal reservoir or other environmental source, or via an insect or animal vector, even human behaviours always contribute to the spread. Early detection and reporting of such events is crucial in minimizing their negative social and economic impacts. Epidemic-prone diseases, including emerging and re-emerging diseases constitute the greatest threat to public health security and the disruption of social and economic developments (World Health Organisation, 2024).

Olumade, et al., (2020) found that Lassa fever, Monkey Pox, Ebola Virus Disease, Yellow Fever, and Poliomyelitis appear to be the top five emerging and re-emerging communicable diseases outbreaks. Nigeria as a country has fought these since the turn of the century. Undeniably, the establishment of the Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC) was a positive important turning point in Nigeria's fight against infectious epidemic outbreaks. According to Rechner, et al. (2023), the COVID-19 pandemic fashioned unprecedented challenges for people with special needs and their caregivers and service providers. An assessment of how the COVID-19 pandemic, and the public health response to it, inequitably impacted the health and well-being of persons with special needs.

Also, Samaila et al., (2020) affirmed that the advent of Covid-19 pandemic has created an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Nigeria. While the pandemic threatened every person in the country, it significantly impacted millions of people with special needs as a result of their pre-existing conditions. People with special needs too faced increased barriers to access COVID-19 vaccines, including difficulties in booking vaccination appointments, travelling to vaccination centres, lack of support to attend appointments and physical inaccessibility of centres (Rotenberg, & Nagesh, 2021). Therefore, safety protocols must be provided and encouraged among persons with special needs.

Safety protocols refer to a set of established guidelines, procedures, rules, and standards put in place or designed to keep an individual safe in their daily living environment (Nesterenko, 2024). Therefore, during an epidemic outbreak safety protocol includes lockdown, evacuation, social distancing, masking, regular hand washing, reverse-evacuation, and shelter in place, among others. The safety protocol is not only expected to take care of those without special needs, but also those with special needs during an epidemic outbreak. However, based on the available literature, the experiences of persons with special needs have not been pleasant. For instance, Disability Rights Monitor (2020) study during an outbreak of epidemic showed that 44% (486) of respondents that participated in the study affirmed that their government took no measures to protect children with special needs in residential schools. Thirty-three percent (476) of the respondents who knew about the situation in institutions said that their government took no measures to protect the lives, health, and safety of persons with special needs in the institutions.

Although, persons with special needs experience barriers to implement basic protection measures such as hand-washing and maintaining physical and social distancing for several reasons, which include lack of accessibility to water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, a reliance on physical contact to get support; unreachability of public health information; or being placed in institutional settings which are often overcrowded and unhealthy (Kuper, & Heydt, 2020). A distinguished feature of the social protection response in some countries was the combination of measures adopted. For example, seventeen countries publicized several measures that had specific reference to persons with special needs. Such as Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Bulgaria, Canada, Egypt, India, Jordan, Kuwait, Kyrgyz Republic, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Syrian Arab Republic, Ukraine and Uzbekistan (Centre for Inclusive Policy for the International Labour Organization, 2021). Among

these countries that declared social protection for persons with special needs Nigeria as a country was not included which might have made the citizenries with special needs to be victims of the epidemic.

Qi, Wu, and Wang (2021) further stated that the special vulnerability of person with special needs in the COVID-19 pandemic has been confirmed by many studies, but data showed that the infection rate of people with special needs in China is lower than those with non-special needs. This difference could be attributed to the Chinese government's targeted safeguards for the special needs community during the pandemic. Nonetheless, in Australia, children with special needs and their families faced difficulties in obtaining necessary medications. They were pre-empted from accessing urgent healthcare due to a lack of relevant information and reliant plans for ensuring their safety during this critical period of the outbreak (ANMJ, 2020). Thus, if this was the experience of persons with special needs in the developed world, the plight of persons with special needs in Nigeria during the outbreak of epidemic may be disturbing. Therefore, this study investigates epidemic outbreak and safety protocols on welfare of persons with special needs in South-west, Nigeria.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Welfare of persons with special needs has encountered lot of setbacks due to the negative societal perceptions of these individuals. As well, the issues around the welfare of persons with special needs became more compounded during epidemic outbreak and this makes them to be more prone to sustaining attack. For instance, during the outbreak of the pandemic that ravaged the world and still manifesting in some countries of the world, nobody can actually give exact figures of the individuals with special needs in Nigeria and particularly in South-west Nigeria who were victims of Covid-19. Even, the outbreak of other epidemics such as poliomyelitis, monkey pox, Ebola virus, Lassa fever, and yellow fever in the country has no records of

actual numbers of persons with special needs who were attacked by any of these epidemics. To safe guard the lives of persons with special needs during epidemic outbreak, there is need to pay urgent attention to the total welfare of persons with special needs through awareness on different epidemics outbreak, precautions, deliberate effort, and safety protocols even before the outbreak of any epidemic. Hence, this study determines epidemic outbreak and safety protocols on welfare of persons with special needs in South-west, Nigeria

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study is to investigate linear combined effect and relative contribution of the independent variables (epidemic outbreak and safety protocols) on the dependent variable (welfare) of persons with special needs, and relationship of the independent variables (epidemic outbreak and safety protocols) on the dependent variable (welfare) of persons with special needs.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the linear combined effect of the independent variables (epidemic outbreak and safety protocols) on the dependent variable (welfare) of persons with special needs
2. What is the relative contribution of the independent variables (epidemic outbreak and safety protocols) on the dependent variable (welfare) of persons with special needs?
3. What is the relationship of the independent variables (epidemic outbreak and safety protocols) on the dependent variable (welfare) of persons with special needs?

METHODOLOGY

Design

A descriptive survey research design was adopted in this study because no variable in the study was manipulated. Also, the researchers are only interested in the linear combined effect, relative contribution and relationship among epidemic outbreak

and safety protocols on welfare of persons with special needs.

Population and Sample

The population of the study composed of all persons with special needs in South-west, Nigeria. The population includes individuals with hearing impairment, visual impairment, intellectual disability, learning disabilities and physical and health impairment. The population age is from 14 years old and above. The population cuts across primary, secondary and tertiary institutions.

The samples of the study is made up five hundred (500) randomly selected respondents from among persons with special needs in South-west, Nigeria. The respondents were randomly selected from the six states (Oyo, Ogun, Lagos, Ondo, Ekiti and Osun) that made up the South-west, Nigeria. The respondents were selected from each of the senatorial zones across at least five randomly selected local government areas in each of the states that makes the South-west, Nigeria, (Oyo state-100, Lagos state-100, Ondo state-50, Ekiti state-50, Ogun state-50 and Osun state-50). The respondents of the study comprises of individuals with hearing impairment, visual impairment, intellectual disability, learning disabilities and physical and health impairment.

Instrument for Data Collection

A questionnaire titled "epidemic outbreak, safety protocols, and welfare of persons with special needs" with thirty items was used. It is on a four likert scales of Strongly Agree (AS), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) with three sections, apart from demographic variables: epidemic outbreak (10-items), safety protocols (10-items), and welfare of persons with special needs (10-items). It was validated by experts in the fields of special education and social work and it has reliability level of $r=0.75$ using Cronbach Alpha.

Procedure for Data Administration

The researchers with their research assistants personally visited the

selected states and the senatorial zones in the South-west, Nigeria. Schools were visited for permissions in each of the selected local government areas. Afterwards, the research interacted with the respondents of the study. The questionnaires were administered on the persons with special needs and were retrieved immediately.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were analysed using Multiple Regression Analysis,

ANOVA and Pearson Products Moment Correlation Coefficient to show relative contribution and relationships among the variables in the study

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What is the linear combined effect of the independent variables (epidemic outbreak and safety protocols) on the dependent variable (welfare) of persons with special needs?

Table 1: Multiple Regression Analysis showing on linear combined effect of independent variables on dependent variable

R	= .499 ^a
Multiple R	= .249
Multiple R ² adjustment	= .246
Standard Error Estimate	= .39400

Analysis of Variance

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1Regression	25.540	2	12.770	82.260	.000 ^b
Residual	77.152	497	.155		
Total	102.692	499			

a. Dependent Variable: Welfare

b. Predictors: (Constant), outbreak of pandemic, epidemic safety protocols)

The regression analysis for Research Question 1 reveals that the constant term, representing the expected welfare of persons with special needs when compared with outbreak of epidemic and safety protocols are both .000, of which sum of squares is 25.540 with a mean square of 12.770. The Regression table shows that the Regression model is statistically significant ($F_{(2, 497)} = 82.260, p < 0.005$). The independent variables also yielded a coefficient of multiple regression (R) of 0. .499^a and a multiple

regression square (R^2) of 0.249. Consequently, within this model, outbreaks of epidemic and safety protocols have significantly linear effect to predict the welfare of persons with special needs in South-West, Nigeria.

Research Question 2: What is the relative contribution of the independent variables (epidemic outbreak and safety protocols) on the dependent variable (welfare) of persons with special needs?

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis showing relative contribution of independents variables to dependent variable

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients			Standardized Coefficients	
		Sig.	B	Std. Error	Beta	t
1	(Constant)	1.004	.093	10.785		.000
	Epidemic outbreak	.0225	.033	.298	6.813	.000
	Safety protocols	.323	.049	.286	6.528	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Welfare

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicates the overall statistical significance of the regression model ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$), suggesting that the combination of predictors effectively explains the variance in the dependent variable, welfare of persons with special needs. Examining individual relative contributions, the constant (intercept) is 1.004, representing the estimated welfare value when both predictors are zero. Notably, the coefficient for Epidemic outbreak/protocols is .0225, with statistical significance ($p < 0.001$),

revealing a positive relative contribution. This implies that the presence of an epidemic outbreak and adherence to safety protocols contribute positively to the welfare of individuals with special needs in South-West

Research Question 3: What is the relationship of the independent variables (epidemic outbreak and safety protocols) on the dependent variable (welfare) of persons with special needs?

Table 3: Correlation showing relationship of epidemic outbreak and safety protocols on welfare of persons with special needs

		Epidemic outbreak	Safety protocols	Welfare
Epidemic outbreak	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.459**	.423**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	500	500	500
Safety protocols	Correlation Coefficient	.459**	1.000	.429**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	500	500	500
Welfare	Correlation Coefficient	.423**	.429**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	500	500	500

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation analysis reveals significant relationships among epidemic outbreaks, adherence to safety protocols,

and the welfare of individuals with special needs in southwest Nigeria. Firstly, there is a positive and statistically significant

correlation observed between the occurrence of an epidemic outbreak and adherence to safety protocols ($r = 0.423^{**}$, $p < 0.01$). Secondly, there is a positive correlation between safety protocols and both welfare of persons with special needs ($r = .429^{**}$, $p < 0.01$) and welfare (Welfare, $r = 0.429^{**}$, $p < 0.01$). This highlights the influence of welfare of persons with special needs in promoting safety adherence and overall well-being among individuals with special needs. Lastly, the positive and highly significant correlation between welfare and Outbreak ($r = 0.429$, $p < 0.01$) underscores the relatedness of safety protocol adherence, epidemic response, and improved welfare for persons with special needs in southwest Nigeria

DISCUSSIONS

The findings of the study revealed that the Regression model is statistically significant, while the independent variables also yielded a coefficient of multiple regression. Consequently, within this model, outbreaks of epidemic and safety protocols have significant linear effect to predict the welfare of persons with special needs in South-West, Nigeria. By implication this finding implies that poor level of welfare of persons with special needs and awareness on safety protocols is often revealed by epidemic outbreak. This agrees with Phillips (2006) assertion which says meeting the welfare needs of persons with special needs is one of the most critical problems facing the world today. The results also corroborate Vásquez, et al. (2021) findings which revealed that in spite of the international directives to support the rights of persons with special needs to participate in society and live with dignity, and countries' responsibilities in relation to them, persons with special needs experience significant unmet support needs. The results of this study further agree with Disability Rights Monitor (2020) whose findings showed that during an outbreak of epidemic respondents confirmed that their government took no measures to protect

children with special needs in residential schools.

The findings also revealed a positive relative contribution. This implies that the presence of an epidemic outbreak and adherence to safety protocols contribute positively to the welfare of individuals with special needs in South-West. The findings support Qi, Wu, and Wang (2021) study which showed that the infection rate of people with special needs in China is lower than those with non-special needs. This difference was attributed to the Chinese government's targeted safeguards for the special needs community during the pandemic. However, the findings negate Kuper, and Heydt (2020) who found that persons with special needs experienced barriers to implement basic protection measures such as hand-washing and maintaining physical and social distancing for several reasons, which include lack of accessibility to water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, a reliance on physical contact to get support; unreachability of public health information; or being placed in institutional settings which are often overcrowded and unhealthy.

The results of the study revealed that there was a positive and statistically significant correlation between the occurrence of an epidemic outbreak and adherence to safety protocols. Secondly, there is a positive correlation between safety protocols and welfare of persons with special needs. This highlights the influence of welfare of persons with special needs in promoting safety adherence and overall well-being among individuals with special needs. Therefore, the findings imply that adherence to safety protocols and knowledge of epidemic outbreak is beneficial to persons with special needs and if the welfare of persons with special needs is enhanced it would foster their adherence to safety protocols during the epidemic outbreak. This agrees with Rotenberg, Nagesh (2021) which stated that people with special needs faced increased barriers to access COVID-19 vaccines, including difficulties in booking vaccination appointments, travelling to vaccination centres, lack of support to attend appointments and physical

inaccessibility of centres. Hence, placing priority on the welfare of persons with special needs would lead to putting in places essential safety protocols for them. The finding also support Saran, White, and Kuper (2019) which opined that a key issue in attaining welfare for persons with special needs is to balance social and economic opportunities from both charitable and economic standpoints.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study revealed that there was a positive and statistically significant correlation between the occurrence of an epidemic outbreak and adherence to safety protocols. Secondly, there is a positive correlation between safety protocols and welfare of persons with special needs. This highlights the influence of welfare of persons with special needs in promoting safety protocols adherence and overall well-being among individuals with special needs. These findings revealed how knowledge of epidemic outbreak and adherence to safety protocols can enhance the welfare of persons with special needs during the outbreak of any epidemic. Therefore, before the outbreak of any epidemic the issues of welfare of persons with special needs should be taken serious and this should as well continues during the epidemics outbreak. Also, instructions on safety precautions should also be made as part of welfare packages for persons with special, because this would help them to make safety protocols as part of their day today's life even before the outbreak of epidemic. Hence, every member of the society should see welfare of persons with special needs and instructions on safety protocols as their responsibilities in order to have holistic and epidemic free society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations are made:

1. The welfare of persons with special needs should be given serious attention by everyone that

makes up the South-west, Nigeria.

2. The South-west governors should not jettison the welfare of the persons with special needs in their various states, but makes this a priority in order to have society where equality is the order of the day.
3. Each state that makes up the South-west should make awareness on safety precautions as part of the responsibilities of the Centre for the Disease Control in their various states and state without this agency should work toward having one and the outreach should involve persons with special needs.
4. Also, persons with special needs should protect themselves against any contagious epidemic outbreak through total adherence to any safety protocols put in place by their leaders.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Disclaimer's statement

The outcome of this work is solely recommended for promotion of welfare and safety protocols among persons with special needs before, during and after outbreak of any epidemic.

Authors' Bio-note

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Authorships and level of contribution

The study was conceived by the lead author, introduction and parts of the literature were as well reviewed by him and the research was funded by him. The second author fine-tuned the study through literature review, coordinated the data collection, analyses and discussion of findings.

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