



Frontline Extension Workers' Information Use, Protective Behaviors and Counseling Practices During Covid -19 Pandemic in Imo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The only people close to the farmers are the extension workers, and to function well, they need the right information, good health and sound mind all the time. However, the sources of information on covid 19 available to them is unknown, hence this study. The study seeks to identify covid 19 information sources of extension workers, examine their protective behaviors, and describe counseling practices they adopt to reach farmers. A total of 120 extension staff purposively chosen from Imo ADP was used to elicit information for the study using questionnaire. Data were analyzed descriptively. The results revealed that the extension staff get information from a variety of ways, such as health organizations (72.5%), healthcare professionals (74.2%), ministries of Health and Agriculture (79.2%). They practice social distancing (83.3%), wearing of face masks (70.5%), avoid contact with eyes, nose and mouth (68.3%), promote hand washing (70.5%), avoid public gathering and many more. In counseling the farmers, the educate them regularly (85%), training of farmers (78.3%) and many more. It is worthy of commendation that since life has no duplicate, the extension staff are doing great job by adhering to covid 19 protocols and should be praised for service to humanity.

Keywords: Hand washing; Covid 19; Social distancing; Counseling

Introduction

As of late, there has been additionally spread of the Covid-19 episode in numerous nations prompting irritation of effectively terrible states of living. At the flare-up of the pandemic, many belittled its impact on rural creation while endeavors were made to oversee it as a well-being emergency. Contingent upon the degree of public turn of events, the impacts of Covid-19 on both rural and urban families are obvious everywhere in the world [1]. Undoubtedly, its worldwide effect has expanded the weakness of rural

creation. Everywhere in the world, governments are confronting the test of lessening the hazardous well-being effect of the pandemic just as guaranteeing that lives and job are ensured.

Thinking about present modifications and future difficulties to food creation and store network, pandemics produce extreme openness in the farming firm [2]. Consequently there is the need for mass action and enlightenment to guarantee sufficient assembly of each establishment, policymakers, farmers and different partners

with the legislative and non-administrative associations for successful reaction.

Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services (AEAS) is the appropriate response. Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services (AEAS) across the world have been helping in tending to both farmers and ranchers' requirements throughout the long term. Notwithstanding, as the world battles to battle the pandemic, farmers and ranchers across the globe face the double weight of lacking well-being administrations combined with convenient expansion administrations for supporting their occupations [3]. Further, it has additionally been accounted for that around 3–6 percent expansion in complete creation worth, could be accomplished if just AEAS administrations are given the manner in which farmers and ranchers need on continuous premise [4]. In spite of the fact that AEAS are conveyed by a great many expansion experts addressing people in general, private and common society situated across the globe, public area has been a significant organization managing AEAS in most places of the world.

The worldwide COVID-19 pandemic presents interesting difficulties and administration openings for Extension frameworks from one side of the country to the other [5,6], with practically all networks and partner bunches prone to be influenced in an assortment of significant ways. Further, Extension has a solid history of working with networks to react to cataclysmic events and emergencies, including storms [7-9], outrageous climate occasions [10,11], oil slicks [12,13], out of control fires [14], rancher psychological well-being [15], monetary recuperation after catastrophes [11], and youth improvement [16].

As a dependable and confided in well-spring of science-based data [17,18], extension can assume a basic part in assisting partners with reacting issues identified with COVID-19. Extension provides accessible, evidence-based information to local communities and responds during disasters and emergencies (National Institute of Food and Agriculture, n.d.). Therefore, Extension is well positioned to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, adjusting and adapting to provide reliable and relevant information under rapidly changing circumstances [5]. This can be done by banding together with networks to comprehend the arising issues and by creating and adjusting Extension programming for this amazing test. Be that as it may, Extension laborers should be cautious while tackling their job. We don't have a clue how they act, and this requires this examination. The broad objective of this work therefore is to describe Frontline Extension Workers Covid 19 information sources, protective behavior, and counseling practices in the study area. The specific objectives are to:

- Identify extension workers covid 19 pandemic

information sources,

- Ascertain extension officers covid 19 pandemic protective behavior,
- Examine extension workers counseling practices used during the pandemic

Methodology

The study was carried out in Imo State of Nigeria, located in the Southeast zone and lies between latitude 4° 45'N and 7° 15' N and longitude 6° 50'E with land area of 5,530 km². The population of the study consists of all extension technical Officers, extension supervisors and extension field agents of Imo State ADP. Stratified random sampling technique (a sampling technique used when the sample does not constitute a homogenous group) was used in selecting the extension respondents for the study. The first strata composed of 18 Technical Officers (Zonal Extension Officers & Subject Matter Specialists), drawn from the three agricultural zones. The second group comprised 39 Block Extension Supervisors (BES), while the third strata comprised of 113 Extension Agents (EAs). Due to the small number of the ZEOs/SMSs and BESs, all 18 and 39 were sampled, while 63 EAs were randomly selected from 113 EAs, making a total of 120 extension officers. Data collected with questionnaire were analyzed using percentages presents in frequency tables.

Results and Discussion

Covid 19 Information Sources of Extension Workers

Several information sources exist for covid-19 awareness. Table 1 showed how the respondents became aware of covid-19 pandemic. The table revealed that the most common sources were Federal ministry of health (79.2%), health organizations (72.5%) such as WHO, FAO, NMA, NNMA; health care professionals (74.2%) such as doctors, nurses and health workers in and around the study area. Other sources of information were social media (42.5%), television/you-tube (51.7%), newspapers (53.3%), family and friends (74.2%), journal/books (46.7%), Ministry of Agriculture (50.8%). Extension professionals have used a variety of sources to obtain information about COVID-19 and, in turn, that large majorities have been involved in disseminating such information to the clientele they serve. Given the widespread [19] use of social media and websites for sharing information, the results suggest that Extension professionals have a substantial capacity to work online. However, many Extension educators might benefit from having specialized training on how to deliver programming via an online platform using sound educational practices.

Information sources	*Percentage
Health Organizations	72.5
Social media	74.2
Television/You tube	51.7
News papers/posters	53.3
Religious organization	2.5
Family/ friends	46.7
Journals/books	74.2
Medical website	44.1
Ministry of Agriculture	50.8
Federal Ministry of Health	79.2

*Multiple responses

Table 1: Sources of Information by Frontline extension.

Frontline Extension Officers Protective Behaviors

Table 2 showed the protective behaviors exhibited by extension workers in the face of covid-19 pandemic. They practiced social distancing(83.3%), usually 1-2 meters apart, hand washing (70.5%), avoid travelling to infected area (83.3%), avoiding contacts with the eyes, nose/mouth (68.3%), avoiding contacts with sick persons (65%), cleaning/ disinfection of surfaces (70.8%) and wearing of hand gloves (801.7%). The above practices help in reducing the spread since covid-19 is transmitted from human to human. Other protective behaviors includes stopping the attendance of social gatherings (73.3%), use of hand sanitizers (51.7%), self-isolation (46.7%) and calling toll -free numbers.

The above concurs with Canipe [20] who said that in the USA, social separating mandates and stay-at-home requests were upheld right off the bat in the pandemic trying to moderate viral transmission [20,21]. Social separating orders decreased the quantity of individuals ready to accumulate, prompting terminations the nation over of insignificant organizations, including eateries and wellness focuses [22]. Introductory reactions to the pandemic brought about broad frenzy purchasing and mass buying of fundamental things and staple food sources [23,24]. Accordingly, there was restricted inventory of and admittance to certain food items [23,24]. This was additionally undermined by COVID-19 episodes in food preparing offices, which intensely restricted purchaser food supply and access. Supermarkets offering internet shopping and pickup were overpowered, bringing about significant delay times necessitating that clients plan and request their staple goods ahead of time [25-27]. Falsehood about COVID-19 transmission additionally prompted public disarray about sanitation, for example, absence of lucidity about whether the sanitizing of food bundles was vital [28].

Protective Behaviors	*Percentage
Practice of social distancing	83.3
Hand washing hygiene	70.5
Use of face mask to cover nose/mouth	70.5
Avoid traveling to infected areas	83.3
Avoidance of eating under cooked foods	79.2
Avoiding contacts with sick people	65.0
Avoid touching eyes, nose/mouth	68.3
Cleaning/disinfecting surfaces regularly	70.8
Wearing of hand gloves	81.7
Stopped attending social gathering	73.3
Use of hand sanitizers	51.7
Calling of toll free number	31.7

*Multiple response

Table 2: Frontline officers' protective behaviors.

Counseling Practice of Frontline Extension Workers

Table 3 showed the counseling practices of frontline extension workers or service delivery. The counseling practices were education of rural farmers (85%), training of farmers on covid-19 prevention (78.3%), education on covid-19 prevention (67.5%), telling farmers to avoid public gathering (82.5%), teaching farmers hand washing (71.7%), telling farmers to visit clinics should they suspect signal of covid-19 (72.5%) and avoidance of home treatment/self-medication(67.5%). Counseling is a confidential space to talk about personal issues so you can understand them more clearly and find new ways to cope. Seeking counseling is about making a positive choice to get help by talking confidentially with a professionally-trained listener who has no other role in your life [29].

Counseling Practice	*Percentage
Education of rural farmers regularly	85.0
Training of farmers on covid-19 precaution	78.3
Education about prevention	67.5
Telling farmers to avoid public gathering	82.5
Teaching farmers hand washing	72.5
Telling farmers to visit clinics if signs occur	72.5
Telling them to avoid home treatment/self-medication	67.5

*Multiple response

Table 3: Frontline Extension Workers Counseling Practices.

Conclusion

Numerous Extension experts have the critical job to give significant data to themselves and for their customers, utilizing different online specialized techniques to a more noteworthy degree than previously. Notwithstanding, the Covid 19 could affect more on Extension experts and their customers are probably going to keep arising in the months and years to come. This is a direct result of the common idea of this new illness. Our examination uncovered that Extension experts have utilized an assortment of sources to acquire data about COVID-19 and, thus, that vast greater parts have been engaged with spreading such data to the customers they serve.

What's more, vast greater parts of respondents were rehearsing prescribed contamination avoidance and control practices to shield themselves from the infection (however there was opportunity to get better among certain gatherings). One justification the more elevated level of wearing face covers among state experts comparative with province specialists and multicounty specialists/territorial trained professionals, nonetheless, is that state experts were bound to live in metropolitan areas, which may have had veil commands, though region specialists were proportionately bound to live in more rustic, non-metro zones.

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