Government Policy and People Attitudes Towards Covid-19 Mitigation Strategies in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State – Nigeria

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Abstract:- Policies of any organisation positively or negatively affect peoples' attitudes toward any development, be it social, economic, political or environmental issues. The purpose of this study is to identify the influence of government policy on people's attitudinal response towards Covid-19 mitigation strategies. The research methodology adopted in the study was cross sectional/survey. The study population of the study was house-hold heads in the study area. A sample size of the study was 2000 household head. The respondents were selected using stratified random sampling techniques. Simple percentages and one-way Analysis of Variance were used in analyzing the collected data. The data for the study was collected through a structured questionnaire designed to elicit attitudinal responses towards Covid-19. The result of the study established a relationship between government policy and peoples attitudinal response towards Covid-19 mitigation strategies. The study, suggested that an impact assessment on government policy should always be conducted before implementing the formulated policy.

Keywords:- *Covid-19, Peoples Attitude, Mitigation Strategies and Government Policy.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Corona virus (Covid-19) pandemic has been ravaging the world till date with new variance occurring recently. The rapid spread of the diseases and increasing number of confirmed cases, on daily basis prompted the Federal Government of Nigeria as well as other nations to set up Covid-19 taskforce which was saddled with the responsibility of formulating some strategies towards monitoring and controlling the spread of the diseases. The control and monitoring of the spread of the virus was eventually referred to as Covid-19 mitigation strategies. These strategies were later adopted by the government as a policy towards controlling the spread of Covid-19.

The policy was necessitated by the fact that there was no known standard cure or vaccine as at the time for Covid-19. Medical treatment for a while was speculative and limited to supportive measures merely aimed at relieving the symptoms. The control of the pandemic was therefore the only alternative of reducing the rate of spread.

The control measures as stipulated, required proper knowledge of the virus, as it concerns with, how it is transmitted and the precautionary measures. A good knowledge of the virus perceived to likely lead people and government towards making informed decisions and policies towards the prevention of the pandemic. It also enhanced the formulation of proper strategies for mitigation the spread of the virus (Loppin & Ar, 2009).

There were however, a lot of speculations about the pandemic that led to some national and state governments adopting and formulating policies that influenced peoples attitudes toward Covid-19 strategies. It is from this background that this study is investigating the impact of government policy on people's attitude toward Covid-19 mitigation strategies.

Government policy and people's attitude towards the spread of Covid-19 affected the rate of spread of the pandemic all over the world. It was a common knowledge that the number of confirmed cases were increasing in most regions on daily basis. The major cities that served economic hupps of nations were identified as epi-centers of the virus. Unfortunately, skepticism over the origin of the virus led to the formulation of some unfavourable government policies. Some of these policies caused some

people to develop negative attitudes towards the control and spread of the virus. The negative attitude developed by people, influenced people to flout the mitigation strategies or even rejecting the vaccination against Covid-19. It is from this perspective that the examination of the influence of government policy on people's attitudinal response to Covid-19 mitigation strategies becomes imperative.

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of government policy on the attitudinal response to Covid-19 mitigation strategies. The objective is to determine the role of government policy in shaping people's attitude toward Covid-19 mitigation strategies in Calabar Municipality. The study will identify the people's level of response to the Covid-19 mitigation strategies in the study area.

The above is achieved by testing the formulated hypothesis stated in null form as follows;
- H_0: There is no significant relationship between people's attitude and government policy toward Covid-19 mitigation strategies.
- H_i: There is no significant relationship between people's attitude and the response to Covid-19 mitigation strategies in the study area.

The rationale of this study is based on the fact that the compliance level towards the control of the spread of Covid-19 was adjudged to be poor despite various government policies. The findings of the study will go a long way to improve and strengthen policies and strategies toward curbing the spread of Covid-19 and similar pandemics. The study will also provide a framework for attitudinal change towards Covid-19 mitigation strategies and other pandemics. It will stimulate further research on individual, corporate and government response towards the enforcement of Covid-19 containment strategies and other pandemicS.

The study area is Calabar Municipality Calabar city was the first capital of the present day Nigeria. It is now the capital of Cross River State. Calabar metropolis lies between Longitude 8^019^1 & 8^024^1 East and Latitude, $4^0\ 04^1$ to 5^054^1 North of the Equator. It is located between Odukpani Local Government in the North and the Atlantic ocean in the South. It is bounded in the West by Calabar river and in the East by the Great Kwa River as it empties into the Atlantic ocean.

It has a landmass of about 164,350 square kilometers. Calabar metropolis has a population of 328,878 in 1991 (NPC, 2006). The projected population of the city in 2015 was 529,362 showing a growth rate of 4% (Nigerian Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Calabar being economic epicenter of the state attracts movement of people within and outside the state.

The city is served with many health care facilities including, University of Calabar Teaching Hospital, Navy Specialist Hospital, Psychiatry Hospital, Infectious Disease Hospital (IDH), a General Hospital, many Private health clinics and about 23 Primary Health Care Centres (CRS

Ministry of Health, 2021). These health care facilities provide health care services to the residents of the state. The state for purposes of tackling Covid-19 pandemic had only one isolation centre located in University of Calabar, Teaching Hospital, Calabar. This was grossly inadequate to cater for Covid-19 cases in the state.

It is worth noting that Cross River State was the only state declared as Covid-19 free in Nigeria. The declaration of the state as Covid-19 free affected the way the residents responded to the Covid-19 mitigation strategies as well as the enforcement of the strategies by government agencies.

II. THE CONCEPT OF GOVERNMENT POLICY

A policy is a principle or course of action proposed or implemented by a governing body concerned (Nnajiofor, Ifeakor and Mgbemengi 2013). The governing bodies here refer to a group of people that act in unison to guide and support a community, unit, business or institutions to achieve a set goal. A policy is therefore explained as a rule or principle that guides decision-making resulting in positive outcomes that enhances development of a community or region. Government policy often states the rationale of the policy. The procedure of pursuing the policy, the procedure may highlight the how, where and when the policies will be executed. Generally, government policy describes a course of action, creating a starting point for change. The policy could be an official statement from the government on how to tackle the problem confronting the society with a view to changing the existing trend. The declaration of Cross River State as Covid-19 free, the enforcement of Covid-19 mitigation strategies, the provision of health care facilities such as testing centres and public enlightenment are all government policies that could affect people's attitude towards Covid-19 containment strategies.

Government policy plays a vital role in determining the success of any programme in any community. A good policy will always attract positive result. The role of government in the control of diseases cannot be underestimated. The outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic in 2019 constraint Nigerian Government to formulate a policy referred to as Covid-19 containment strategies designed to control the spread of the pandemic. It is imperative to assess the role the policy played in controlling the spread of the pandemic as well as the role the policy played in changing the people's attitude towards the pandemic. It is from this perspective this study becomes imperative.

It is argued that, the easiest way of contracting the virus was through close contact with infested persons or surfaces. (Azlan, Hamzah, Sien, Ayub and Mohamade 2020). In view of this it is opined that the spread of the virus can be reduced if necessary measures are taken to reduce the rate of physical contacts with infested people (Brug, Aro, Oenema, de Zwart, Richards and Bishop 2004). Based on the above, many strategies were adapted towards reducing human to human transmission. This is important in the face of the obscurity surrounding the virus. Presently, there are a lot of confusion and misunderstanding about the virus, how

it can spread and the precautions for the prevention. The poor knowledge of the virus influenced people's attitude and perception towards the pandemic as well as the response to the containment strategies (Ohia, et. Al 2020). There is no gain-saying that people's attitude and perception predicted the attitudes towards the virus. It therefore follows that people attitude towards Covid-19 would play an integral role in determining the society's readiness to accept behavioural changes or measures put in place by Health authorities. (Olapegba, Ayandele, Kolawole, Oguntayo, Gandi, Dangiwa, Ottu and Lerfa 2020).

It is from this background that the government, non-governmental organizations and world health organizations formulated measures to control the spread of the virus especially as it concerns human to human infection. The prescribed measures included; regular hand washing, use of hand sanitizers, wearing of nose masks, social distancing, respiratory etiquettes and self-isolation when sick (Cao, Cheng, Yu and Xet 2020). Other strategies adopted included; ban in public gatherings especially above 50 persons, tracing and tracking of possible victims and their contacts, closing of national borders, schools, worship centers, public places and the setting of Covid-19 testing laboratories and administration of Covid-19 vaccine. It is however disturbing that despite the enforcement of these strategies some Nigerians refused to comply with the mitigation strategies. Many people were beclouded with superstitions, ignorance of the science behind the infection and other sentiments. Such people tended to violate the social distancing rule by attending church and mosque programmes with the belief that prayers and fasting can prevent or cure the infection. They argued that lockdown, self-isolation and wearing of nose masks were alien to African culture. Such attitudes and beliefs would facilitate the rapid spread of the virus and if not checked will result to community transmission level (NCDC, 2020).

In Nigeria, skepticism caused many to disobey the NCDC strategies towards the control of the spread of Covid-19. The question is what was responsible for such skepticism? The Skepticism was caused by individual perception that the virus was Chinese invention to control the world, others viewed it as a biological weapon formed by American or China to control the world, some believed the virus does not exist but a mere propaganda by the Western world yet others viewed it as an attempt by the politicians to enrich themselves (Olapegbe, et al 2020). All these affected the attitudinal response to the containment strategies of Covid-19. It is from this background that a study on the attitudinal response towards the containment strategies for Covid-19 becomes imperative.

III. CONCEPT OF ATTITUDE

The Oxford Dictionary defines attitude as a set of emotions, beliefs and behaviours exhibited towards a particular object, person, thing, event or action. Attitudes are often the result of experience or up-bringing and can have great influence on how an individual reacts to change or policy. Psychologists define attitudes as a learned tendency to evaluate issues in a certain way. This can be evaluation of people, object, event or action. Such evaluation may be positive or negative. When the evaluation is positive the individual exposure to the issues or policies will be positive. In other words, a person with positive attitude to an issue is likely to accept the issue as it is. On the other hand, a person with a negative attitude is likely to reject or oppose the issues involved in the event.

The concept of peoples' attitude is very important in evaluating government policies especially as it concerns the Covid-19 containment strategies. This is further emphasized by the fact that attitudes can be explicit and implicit. Explicit attitudes are those that we are consciously aware about but still have effect on the belief and behaviour. This can explain the non-compliance to the Covid-19 protocol as being enforced by the federal and state government of Nigeria.

Knowledge of how attitudes are formed or developed is necessary in enforcing policies in any region. Azlan et al (2020) opined that attitudes can be formed based on experience, learning, conditioning, observation and social roles or social norms. Individual experience may be as a result of direct experience or observation and the accompanying impact. Similarly, the social norms of the society also have great influence on the attitude and behaviour of the people. The concept of attitude formation can explain why people are reacting positively or negatively towards the implementation of some government policies including the strategies towards controlling the spread of corona virus (Cherry, 2020).

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey approach. This is due to the wide spread population that may be difficult to locate everybody. The study population is all households in Calabar metropolis. The projected population of Calabar as given by Nigerian Bureau of Statistics in 2021 was 529,362. Based on this population, a sample size of 2000 households was used for this study. Multiple sampling technique was used in selecting the respondents.

The study area was divided in three zones. The three (3) were stratified into four units each and 2 units were randomly selected from each zones. Finally, 2000 households were proportionally selected randomly from the randomly selected six units of the study area.

V. DATA COLLECTION

Data was collected using structured questionnaire tagged Covid-19 Attitudinal Response Questionnaire (CARQ). The questionnaire was designed to elicit responses on people's attitude towards Covid-19 mitigation strategies. The attitudes of people were assessed using 5 point likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly dis-agree.

The questionnaire was validated by an expert to ensure validity to the items. The questionnaire was administered simultaneously to randomly selected households in the study area through appointed field assistants.

In compiling the data, the rating of the scale were assigned points as follows; Strongly agree (SA) – 5 points, Agree (A) – 4 points, Disagree (D) – 3 points, Strongly agree (SA) – 2 points and undecided (UD) – 1 point. Strongly agree and agree were regarded as positive responses while strongly disagree and disagree were classified as negative response. The respondents responses were added to give a single score.

Thus, the minimum score of each respondent was 15 points and maximum score was 75 points. A respondent who scored 54 points and below was considered to have a negative attitude, while those with more than 45 points were considered to have positive attitude.

DATA HANDLING

The collected data was organized into tables and analyzed using simple percentages. The formulated hypotheses were tested using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). In the analysis, if the calculated F-value is greater than the critical value, the hypothesis (H_0) was rejected. But where the calculated F-value is smaller than the critical value, the alternative hypothesis (H_i) was accepted.

VI. RESULT OF THE STUDY

The result of the study was as presented below;

Table 1: COMPLIANCE TO COVID-19 MITIGATION STRATEGIES

S/N	Mitigation strategy	Compliance level	%	Non compliance	%
1	Restriction of movement	980	49	1020	51
2	Avoiding crowded places	796	38.8	1304	61.2
3	Use of Nose mask	1080	54	920	46
4	Social distance	860	43	1140	57
5	Coughing, sneezing and touching of surfacing	995	49.7	1005	50.3
6	Vaccination against Covid-19	950	47.5	1050	52.5
	TOTAL	**5667**	**46.81**	**6439**	**53.18**

Result in table 1 showed the compliance level to Covid-19 mitigation strategies in the study area. The result showed that the general compliance level was 46.81% while the non compliance level was 54.18%. The non compliance level was higher than the compliance level, implying that many people did not adhere to the mitigation strategies.

The result further showed that the compliance to some mitigation strategies was higher than others. For instance, the compliance to the restriction of peoples' movement during the pandemic was only 49% while the wearing of nose mask was 54%. The implication of this result is that the restriction of movement was not properly enforced, hence, people were found in crowded places such as markets, churches and other public places as well as attending burial ceremonies unhindered. The low compliance level to the mitigation strategies was attributed to Covid-19 free status of state declared by the government.

TABLE 2: POLICIES AFFECTING COMPLIANCE TO COVID-19 MITIGATION STRATEGIES

S/N	Policy	Non compliance due to the policy	Percentage of non compliance
1	Declaration of the state as Covid-19 free	1346	67.3
2	Poor and uncoordinated Government Enforcement strategies	1201	60.1
3	Non provision of palliative measures to people	887	49.8
4	Obscure nature and negative propaganda towards Covid-19	1056	52.8
5	Uncoordinated Government policies to Covid-19	889	44.5
	TOTAL	**6489**	**64.89**

Table 2 showed that about 64.89% of the population in the study area did not observe Covid-19 protocol due to some government policies toward Covid-19. This result implies that only 35.11% complied to the mitigation strategies. Analysis of the influence of various policies revealed that the declaration of the state as Covid-19 free negatively affected the level of compliance to the strategies.

About 67.5% of the people did not comply to the strategies since it was assumed that there was no Covid-19 in the state.

Equally, poor enforcement of the mitigation strategies was identified as the cause of high non compliance level to the Covid-19 containment strategies. About 60% of the population did not comply to the mitigation strategies due to poor enforcement. People were found in crowded places or moving about without nose mask as no penalty was imposed on defaulters.

The non provision of palliatives to the people during the pandemic negatively affected the level of compliance to the mitigation strategies. About 49.8% of the population did not comply to the layout strategies because palliatives to cushion the effect of Covid-19 were not provided by government. Thus people were found violating the restriction of movement protocol in search of livelihood.

The obscured nature of Covid-19 and the accompanied negative propaganda accounted for about 52.8% of the non-compliance to the mitigation strategies. The propaganda such as "Covid-19 was a design by China to rule the world" created a negative impact on people and thus influenced the acceptance of any measure to contain the spread of the diseases.

The uncoordinated government policies towards containing the spread of Covid-19 accounted for about 33.4% of the population who did not observe the protocol due to poor coordination of the mitigation strategies.

TABLE 3: PEOPLE'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS COVID-19 MITIGATION STRATEGIES

S/N	Mitigation Strategy	People's Attitude				
		SA	A	DA	SDA	UD
1	Restrict of people's movement can control the spread of Covid-19	240 (12%)	200 (9%)	1020 (35%)	500 (27%)	40 (1%)
2	Avoidance of crowded places limits the spread of Covid-19	200 (10%)	180 (9%)	700 (35%)	840 (43%)	80 (4%)
3	Wearing of face mask help to reduce the spread of Covid-19	212 (10.6%)	332 (16.6%)	858 (42.9%)	452 (22.6%)	152 (7.6%)
4	Regular hand washing goes along way to prevent the spread of Covid-19	208 (10.4%)	176 (8.8%)	696 (34.8%)	836 (41.8%)	84 (4.2%)
5	Observing social distance in public places prevents the spread of Covid-19	340 (17%)	860 (43%)	380 (19%)	260 (13%)	160 (8%)
6	Coughing, sneezing and teaching of surfaces is the easiest means of contacting Covid-19	520 (26%)	1060 (52%)	220 (11%)	200 (10%)	180 (9%)
7	Vaccination against Covid-19 is the best way of preventing the spread of Covid-19	220 (11%)	520 (26%)	1060 (52%)	180 (9%)	200 (10%)
	TOTAL	1940	3328	4934	3268	896
	PERCENTAGE	13.50	23.16	34.34	22.75	6.24

Table 3 showed people's attitudinal responses to Covid-19 mitigation strategies. The general attitudinal responses portrayed that 13.50% people had very strong positive attitude while 23.16% had positive attitude to the strategies. On the other hand, about 22.75% people had very strong negative attitude while 34.34% had low negative attitude to the mitigation strategies. 6.24% of the population had lukewarm attitude to the strategies. However, the attitude toward mitigation strategy varies from people to people, depending on individual perception of the pandemic.

A detailed analysis of people's attitude to restriction of movement strategies showed that about 62% of the study population had negative attitude while only 21% had positive attitude toward the containment strategies. Equally, on avoidance of crowded places, only 19% had positive attitude while 78% had negative attitude. Wearing of face mask, strategy attracted about 33.2% positive attitude while about 59.6% of the population had negative attitude. In the maintenance of social distance strategy, about 30% exhibited positive attitude while 62% showed negative. The result showed that the study population had negative attitude towards most of the mitigation strategies.

TABLE 4: ONE-WAY ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE (ANOVA) OF GOVERNMENT POLICY AND ATTITUDINAL RESPONSE TO COVID-19 MITIGATION STRATEGIES

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares (SS)	Degree of Freedom (df)	Mean Square (MS)	F	Sign of F
Between Groups	905.4	2	524.85	6.56	.003
Within Groups	926.6	12	65.62		

The result from table 3 showed the calculated F-value as 6.56 and the critical value at 2 and 12 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significant as 3.57. This revealed that the calculated F-value was greater than the critical value. It therefore followed that the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference in government policy on Covid-19 and people's attitudinal response towards Covid-19 mitigation strategies in the study area. It therefore follows that the alternate hypothesis which stated that significant difference exist between government policy on Covid-19 and people's attitude towards Covid-19 in the study area. The implication of this finding is that government positively or negatively affected attitudinal response to Covid-19 mitigation strategies in the study area.

VII. DISCUSSION OF RESULT

The result of the study generally established a positive relationship between government policy and people's attitudes towards Covid-19 mitigation strategies in the study area. This implies that policies adopted by government in tackling Covid-19 influenced either positively or negatively peoples attitudes towards the pandemic. The result further highlighted that the state government declaration of the state as Covid-19 free caused about 67.3% of the population not to observe, the Covid-19 protocols. Equally, the poor and uncoordinated enforcement strategies by government led to the non compliance of the strategies by 60.1% of the study population. In other words, some government policies caused some people to develop negative attitudes toward the pandemic resulting to non-compliance to the mitigation strategies.

The little or non provision of palliative measures to cushion the impact of the pandemic caused about 49.8% of people not to comply with the laid-down strategies. This was particularly true as people were found in market places and engaged in other economic activities to make a living, hencing restriction of movement or closure of boundaries strategy was abused.

The study also established that obscure nature and propaganda towards Covid-19 influenced the attitude of people towards the mitigation strategies. Skepticism and propaganda surrounding Covid-19 pandemic accounted for about 52.8% non compliance level (see table 2). This is confirmed by the fact that many people perceived it as a scam by China to rule the world. Others speculated that it can be cured by some herds or that tropical climate with hot temperatures is resistant to Covid-19. Such perception influenced the attitude of people. The negative propaganda towards the virus impacted negative to the attitudinal response to the pandemic in the study area. This explained why only 46.81% of the population complied to the formulated mitigation strategies.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This study concluded that government policies and actions influenced people's attitudinal response to Covid-19 mitigation strategies. It established that impact of government policy was not too positive as about 64.89% of the population of the study did not adhere to the mitigation strategies for various reasons. This conclusion is derived from the fact that during the pandemic, people were found in crowded places, like the church, markets and burial places, some without nose mask while others did not observe washing of hands or coughing and sneezing into their elbows. It is therefore concluded that people's high negative attitude towards the mitigation strategies was responsible for the observed high non-compliance level to the strategies in the area. The high non compliance level implies that the spread of the virus would be high as observed in most Nigerian cities. The exponential increase in the rate of infection would put more pressure on the existing health facilities and will drastically affect the economic activities of the area and thus worsen the poverty level of the study area. It is particularly true as more mysterious deaths are still being recorded in the study. The relaxation of the protocol in the study protend more danger as new Covid-19 variants are being recorded in some part of the world. It is concluded that since a relationship exist between government policy and people's attitude to Covid-19 mitigation strategies, positive government policies would likely influence attitudinal response to Covid-19 strategies and as such stem the spread of the virus as well as other pandemics.

RECOMMENDATION

In view of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are put forward;
- Impact assessment of government policies should be conducted before implementation of the policy. Policies that will create negative impact should be discarded.
- To achieve desired objectives of any programme, public enlightenment campaigns and education should be carried out, especially at the grass-root to remove skepticism among the people. Proper enlightenment of programmes can influence the attitudes of people towards a pandemic like Covid-19.
- Government should strengthen enforcement strategies for containing the spread of Covid-19 and other pandemic. Covid-19 surge should not be taken for granted especially new variants are emerging in some countries. Covid-19 mitigation strategies should not be completely relaxed. Health care institutions should directed to conduct Covid-19 test on patients to always determine the Covid-19 status.
- State government should pull resource together toward handling emergency case of upsurge of Covid-19 and other pandemic
- Programmes to attitudinal change should be organized with a view to improving people's attitudes towards government policies and programmes in the study area.

- A more robust study should be conducted in attitudinal response to government policies and control of pandemics.

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