

## **THE MONKEY POX VIRUS AND THE INHERENT DANGER IN RUMOUR MONGERING: FOCUS ON NIGERIA PRINT MEDIA REPORTAGE OF THE CRISIS**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The prerogative of this exercise is the reportage of the monkey box virus by Nigerian print media. In spite of the horrendous deaths and turbulence imposed on Nigerians by the dreaded Ebola plague in the later part of 2014, Nigerians now face another grim pestilence; the monkey pox virus. This study is adopting the qualitative approach and secondary sources of newspaper publications as relevant literature. This inquiry derives its theoretical foundation from the agenda setting perspective. In spite of alarming rumours of forced vaccinations on school children, the study through relevant newspaper publications reveals the Nigerian print media, transcending through ethnic, religious and cultural barriers, conducted a high degree of coverage to create public awareness of the virus. The paper recommends synergy between the government and the media to create public awareness against the dread of monkey pox. This is appropriate antidote to galvanise standardized template in creating public awareness of communicable diseases. As sensitization by the Nigerian media was crucial in the demise of the 2014 Ebola crisis, the media, particularly newspapers have excelled in creating overwhelming public awareness and sanitation procedure to contain the monkey pox virus incursion into the Nigeria.*

**KEY WORDS:** Public health communication, Monkey Pox Disease, Print Media, Reportage, rumour mongers, Crisis.

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## INTRODUCTION

The dread, fear, danger and death posed to Nigerians by the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD), in the months of July to December 2014, will remain indelible in the annals of Nigerian history. From Liberia throughout the West Africa sub region, the Ebola scourge left in its wake thousands of death. In spite, the stunning casualties associated to the HIV/AIDS, Ebola's ravaging pandemic destructive tendencies of Nigerians' psychic, human development and the economy temporally made the dreaded Boko Haram insurgents seem forgotten scallywags. Then, more than 22 countries revoked visas granted to Nigerians, cancelled business memoranda, international travel bans, not only were the health of Nigerian citizens in jeopardy, the economy faced disintegration and national development stagnated. The monkey pox plague, though strange to Nigerians; in September 2017 became for Nigeria new cotemporary phenomenon which erupted with destructive force. The ferocious outbreak of the monkey pox, like epidemic catastrophe or devastative thunder bolt caught Nigerians unaware. Unlike meteorite, monkey pox did not fall from the sky, out of nowhere; it started in central part of the Democratic Republic of Congo in the 1970's. The first recorded case of the dreaded disease in Nigeria was through a man who killed a monkey and ate the meat with members of his family in Bayelsa state. This became the primary or index case before infecting others. Like harmattan wild fire, monkey pox spread to Enugu in the South-Eastern geo-political zone, Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers State in the South-South geo-political zone. Besides a patient who committed suicide, luckily no confirmed death has been reported; however, the havoc and pandemonium created by monkey pox which is still raging as the time of this research are certain to leave indelible marks in the annals of Nigeria's public health. In several southern states, rumours were rife with soldiers forcing their way into primary and secondary schools to forcefully inoculate children with monkey pox vaccination. The fear of sinister motives and lack of initial proper sensitization created state of fear and stampede when parents broke down school gates and scaled to withdraw their wards. As the following front page headline (*Vanguard*, Wednesday, October 18, 2017) sums it up: ***Pandemonium in Ondo, Rivers over Monkey Pox.***

Monkey pox is transmitted through blood, vomit, and sweat of an infected victim. Symptoms include high fever and diarrhoea. Health scholars noted that most effective measure in preventing the spread of the disease is through strategic public health mandates, such good infection control practices include isolation, quarantine, contact tracking, provision of health staff protective gear, government monitoring and media sensitization. Media public awareness campaigns become very pertinent because Nigerians, being used to culture of hugging, handshakes, elaborate family greetings, clustered tenements, close-quarter worships, perceive monkey pox, like Ebola as instant death sentence. With the spread of dreadful, contagious diseases as HIV/AIDS, Ebola, anti-biotic resistant tuberculosis, sexually transmitted diseases; appropriate health communication is now a prominent global concern. Sridhar (1991:53) opined that:

Public health considerations is about the most significant of disposal of the dead because, the ultimate purpose of public health is to control diseases, promote health and prolong life. Improper disposal of the dead poses a serious health hazard, especially when death is due to epidemics and communicable disease. The problem is worse in populous tropical countries. Improper disposal of the dead makes bodies become reservoirs of infection.

The increasing demand and objectives of healthy living, longevity highlight and illustrate the importance of effective public health communication. Relevance of which can never be over

emphasized considering that virtually every knowledge, solution to human health, well-being, including disease prevention, affordable health care, clamour for universal health insurance, rural community health programs, antenatal /infant health concerns, health promotion, quality of life and new discoveries depend on effective media dissemination of health information. The dreadful experience of the Ebola scourge and now the monkey pox virus have sharpened any blurred vision of Nigeria's public health officials, joining global community in seeking competencies, professional capacity building, and acquisition of latest information to effectively quell outbreaks of deadly contagious diseases. The clamour and prominence for public health information orchestrated by the monkey pox virus seem urgent because of contemporaneous vital public health, national development implications and imperatives. Obviously, no nation of sick citizens could muster any meaningful development when such ravaging plague as monkey pox can jeopardize national security. Deadly contagious virus as monkey pox, Ebola, HIV/AIDS can paralyse, devastate the workforce, educational, political, economic, social milieu and developmental aspirations of precariously fledgling democracy as Nigeria

The need to create composite public forum to sensitize, inform, educate, mobilize citizens of preventable measures to evade the spread of deadly plagues as monkey pox, require professional journalistic devotion, serious commitment, investigative journalism commitment, humanitarian sensitivity in reporting public health. Besides the creation of media awareness of public health consciousness and preventive measures, the prerogative of public health communication is crucial in compelling the public to come to terms to the realities, dangers, demerits of careless unsanitary, slum dwelling and potential benefits of clean, curative, healthy existence. Since communication is the pivotal, rallying point and hollering centre-piece in championing effective public health communication, excellent health communication strategies should evolve in the realm creating maximum good health benefits in the society; cheating death to prolong human life. No doubt, Dudley Dorothy, American writer in Seldes (1985:116) noted, "The strongest desire known to human life is to continue living. The next strongest is to use the instruments by which life is generated for its own rewards, not for the sake of generation. The third potent desire is to excel and be acknowledged."

In spite of environmental, social and psychological influences on behaviour and health, global challenges posed by contagious diseases, health communication scholars and practitioners recognize the importance of prevention in health care systems. The need to understand health-conscious human behaviour, perceptions, social norms, emotions and fear of uncertainty in health issues through competent public health newspaper awareness is the focus of this qualitative discourse.

### **Statement of the Problem**

After passing through horrendous deaths and fear of extinction during the 2014 Ebola plague, Nigerians are shocked that in October 2017, they are faced with another deadly virus by the name Monkey Pox. To compound, incite national fear and anxiety, some people (saboteurs) utilized the social media as facebook, Instagram, whatsapp as rumour mongering tool to demoralize the populace; that soldiers were forcefully vaccinating school children against monkey box. This propaganda spread like harmattan fire which stated that the government deployed the forced vaccination exercise to depopulate the South-East and South- South geopolitical zones of Nigerian. In chaotic droves, parents scampered through fences, broke school gates to evacuate their children from various schools, forcing temporal closure of several primary and secondary schools. This

chaotic scenario depict lack of sensitivity, sensualisation, creation of appropriate awareness by the government, particularly at a time when government soldiers recently killed some Igbos in the South-East and proscribed Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) and thereafter launched a medical outreach. The implication is the existence of communication gap between the government, the media and the masses. These lapses created an advantage for nefarious rumour mongers.

### Definition of Operational Terms

In order to avoid ambiguity, it essential that some phrases used in this study be explained in concise and precise manner. Health communication is the art of informing, influencing, persuading, motivating and galvanising individuals, masses and the public about vital health issues and subsequent behavioural changes to achieve cohesive, realistic public health goals. Public Health communication is rapidly gaining recognition because of emphasis placed on combining theory and practice in understanding communication processes in order to alter boomeranging bad human behaviour. This approach seem appropriate, pertinent in this millennium when major threats to global public health (through diseases and environmental calamities) are entrenched in human behaviour, recklessness and decadent moral disposition. Communication is at the heart of who we are as mortals. It is a mode of exchanging information and signifies human symbolic capability. Exchange of information and symbolism reflect James Carey (1989) is characterized as the *transmission* and *ritual* views of communication. As harbinger of knowledge acquisition, According to Baran (2004, p.5) communication serves as the symbolic exchange of shared meaning. What then, is health communication or health reporting? How can public health communication be tilted to dispel the spread of contagious deadly diseases or zero tolerance of unhealthy, unsanitary, slum dwellings and habitude?

Intervention efforts to change behaviours are communicative acts. By focusing mostly on the transmission function of information exchange, such efforts often neglect ritualistic processes that are automatically engaged through communication. In adopting the transmission view of communication, it is reasonable to think carefully about the channels through which intervention messages are disseminated, to whom the message is attributed, how audience members respond and the features of messages that have the greatest impact. It is pertinent to gauge implications of rumour mongering to dispel coordinated effort to contain contagious diseases. These considerations reflect the essential components of the communication process: channel, source, receiver and message, respectively. In the ritual view, however, target audiences are conceptualized as members of social networks who interact with one another, engage in social ceremony and derive meaning from the enactment of habitual behaviours.

**Monkey pox virus:** Monkey pox virus is highly contagious and transmitted through blood, vomit, and sweat of an infected victim. Its primary index infestation is from infected monkeys to humans. Symptoms include high fever, diarrhoea and similar but bigger bumps than chicken pox.

**Print media** in this study is reflective of Nigerian newspapers with the exclusion of books, magazines, radio, and television or internet communication.

**Reportage** is the amount of space, framing or angle of reporting and number of Nigerian newspapers which devoted time, space and resources in reporting the monkey pox epidemic.

**Rumour mongers:** Those who circulate gossips, hearsays, unverified report without known authority for the truth. Inclusive are those who connive, commence and encourage the spread



of malicious lies against a person, government, business, organization, civil society and corporate entities. As regards this study, it is a fabrication of lies about the monkey pox virus crisis to mislead the public or incites hatred against the government or soldiers. This includes deliberately spreading lies that soldiers forced their way into schools to deploy compulsory inoculations to depopulate certain sections of the country.

Crisis is a situation of considerable stress, uncertainty, and fear about natural disasters, human errors, accidents, tragedy or plagues. It is the turning point in height of events such as calamity, death, natural disaster as hurricane and pestilence. In the case of this study the epidemic of the monkey pox is a Nigerian crisis.

### **Theoretical Framework**

As propounded in 1972 by Maxwell Macomb and Donald Shaw, the Agenda setting theory assert that the press set agenda for the public or citizens. This implies that the media actually determine what people discuss while setting the international or national agenda of most vital issues affecting society. McQuail (2005) cited Walter Lippmann's opinion that, while the media would not tell people what to think, the media certainly tell people what to think about. Simply, the arrival of the monkey pox, the news of its infestation, the frequency of reportage, the prominence given to such epidemic force such issues on the front burner of public discourse.

Baran and Davis (2009, p.278) cited Bernard Cohen as being credited with refining Walter Lippmann's idea of agenda-setting theory. Cohen wrote that the press is more than just purveyor of information; writers, editors and publishers of newspapers could influence what people read and think about.

Applying this theory to this study, Nigerian newspapers, editors, reporters and gate-keepers can set public agenda. Instead on mere daily events, newspapers can concentrate their reportage on fear, crisis and potential death posed by monkey pox virus, including prevention measures to curb the virus. The print media has social responsibility obligation to avoid break down of law, order, preserve the unity of Nigeria, and expose the implications of nefarious rumours mongering which created inestimable anxiety, divisiveness, suspicion and chaos.

### **Nigeria Print Media and the Monkey Pox Virus**

Among the pivotal functions of the media in a society, besides the provision of knowledge, news and information, is surveillance of the environment. Therefore, it is the prerogative of the media in the first instance to raise alarm over an impending calamity. In so doing there media raises public awareness, sensitize the masses, and proffer potentials solutions while galvanizing the government and health officials to appropriate action. During the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) of 2014, both local and international media as *CNN* took the bull by the horn by reporting on the devastating effects of the scourge which compelled the government and health officials to action and eventual defeat of the plague. Take the issue of hand washing, easiest and most effective way to prevent infectious diseases. *Vanguard* (Tuesday, June 26, 2014. Page 51) spread the message of and vitality of hand washing, as Procter and Gamble; manufacturers of Safeguard soap embarked on enlightenment 'Family Fun Fair' campaign. In the *Vanguard* article, public health physician, Dr, Nkechi Olalere noted that respiratory infections as pneumonia, dysentery, much more serious illnesses as meningitis, bronchitis, influenza, hepatitis A, reduction in resistant staphylococcus aureus; all of which with the propensity of fatality, can be prevented through proper hand washing hygiene.

Thereby the media played her role of social responsibility and agenda setter to the hilt and safeguarded Nigerians from eminent extinction. With the current onslaught of the monkey pox virus (MPV) and subsequent rumour mongering, most mass communicational channels particularly local newspapers took up the challenge to sensitize, create awareness, sanitary precautions and awaken both the government and public health officials to combat the scourge. In essence the print media is fulfilling her obligations to safe-guard the society by providing agenda setting reportage of the outbreak of monkey pox.

Although health communication in developing nations of Africa as Nigeria faces challenges of the gap between health literacy and health communication, and lack of or inconsistent government policies. Furthermore, flaws in communicating through the mass media and a lack of trained professionals, these issues can be over come through concerted effort by the mass media to be them to the front burner of public discuss through agenda setting.

Mass communication is used to promote beneficial changes in behaviour among citizens. A major criticism of the use of mass media as a method of health communication is the unfortunate ability for false and misinformed messages to spread quickly through the mass media, before they have the chance to be disputed by professionals. It generates panic amongst the public who receive the messages. The social media as an extension technology with interactive ability to disseminate information at the speed of light and accessible to everyone does not help matters.

For instance, a few years back, majority of citizens distrusted of vaccinations in Northern regions of Nigeria due to verbal utterances of misguided individuals based on religious/ethnic motives and the publication of false messages which link childhood measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccination with autism. The speed with which this message spread through social media networking caused many families to distrust vaccinations, hence abstained from having their children inoculated. Even though at the end the panic was found to be fictitious, several citizens still harbour a lingering suspicion towards vaccinations. This is a hindrance to public health communication. In 2017, with the monkey pox, Nigerians are faced with similar rumour mongering.

As regards adverse information, public health professionals should be able to identify the contexts, channels, messages and reasons that will motivate individuals to heed and use health information – whether designing health communication programs for vulnerable populations, framing a health policy issue for legislators, or educating patients on medications or sensitizing the populace during deadly outbreaks of contagious diseases. Immediate past President of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan, as quoted in *Vanguard Allure* (March 15, 2015 page 10) had this to say about dangers of false, scary communication in Nigeria's health sector:

...there is no government that will not take the health seriously.  
 ...Some people including a professor preached that polio vaccines reduced the reproductive rate of a woman. In fact some of the officials of government that were handling the immunization were attacked and even killed. That certainly set us back...

Some Nigerian newspapers available to this study were examined which demonstrated that Nigeria print media devoted ample time, resources and space to create public awareness about the history, infection and how to avoid monkey pox virus. Suffice it with the following examples. *The Nation* (Thursday, October 26, 2017 page 20) captioned: Muslim Congress Seeks State of Emergency in Health Sector. It questioned; The National president of Muslim

Congress, Dr. Luqman AbdurRaheem queried "...what are the three different levels of government doing to checkmate these outbreaks and especially this particular monkey pox outbreak? According to the minister of Health, Prof. Isaac Adewole, no fewer than 33 suspected cases of monkey box have been reported in seven states across the nation. *The Nation* (Saturday, October 14, 2017) on its Weekend Life front page, with a menacing picture of a monkey and an infected patient, had this screaming headline: PANIC IN THE LAND...as Monkey Pox Scare spreads. \*Nigerians employ weird measures to escape being infected \* Bush meat sellers, food vendors lament low patronage \* States on red alert to contain further spread. The lead paragraph stated; "The wave of anxiety that swept across the country in 2014 when the dreaded Ebola virus disease hit the country resurfaced during the week with the spread of monkey pox disease to seven states".

In detail the same article enumerated the inevitable consequences of the monkey pox scare. Several Nigerians avoid sitting next to strangers in public transport, High degree of tension, anxiety, apprehension and suspicion have pervade states of the nation, Vivacious lifestyles of residents have been disrupted, people have stopped shaking hands with one another, the worst affected business include meat vendors, poultry owners and hunters, and customers have stopped patronizing bush meat joints. A bush meat vendor at Abeokuta, Aмоке Iyabo lamented, "Those saying bush meat causes monkey pox are only spoiling our business like they did in the past with the Ebola disease. This is not fair to us. This is our business and that is where we make money to train our children and feed our families". *Vanguard* (Friday, October 19, 2017 page 5) captioned Monkey Pox – Army not Dispensing Vaccines – FG. In part, it stated that the Federal government has exonerated the military reiterating that the army is not dispensing any vaccines. In his Candid Notes column (*Vanguard*, Tuesday, October, 24, 2017 page 17) Yinka Odumakin Rumours have spread across cities that the army was carrying out vaccinations aimed at killing school children by injecting them with the latest affliction in town –monkey pox. The rumour went further that there was a plan to reduce the population of certain sections of the country. Given the recent Operation Python Dance which allegedly inflicted horrors in the South East,...Explanation by the Military in Enugu that the free medical outreach was not aimed at depopulating the region fell on deaf ears. *Vanguard* (Tuesday, October 24, 2017 page 34) captioned: Monkey Pox Controversy may Impede Battle Against Polio- Chairman of Nigeria National Polio Plus Committee, Dr. Tunji Funsho stated, " Since the news broke about monkey pox, we have met a brick wall following the allegation that vaccines were meant to wipe out people from certain parts of the country. In *Vanguard* (Thursday, November 2, 2017 page 34) captioned Monkey Pox Cases now 94 – UNICEF, the first paragraph read: "The United Nations Childrens Fund has said with confirmation of two cases of monkey pox in Benue State, the number of cases now stands at 94." As part of the measures to prevent the spread of monkey pox virus to other states, several state governments have set up emergency hotlines for the public and a situation room to monitor the plague. *The Guardian* (Saturday, October 21, 2017, page 9) as written by Niadvra Musa, titled: We'll Not Close Schools Over Inoculation Scare, Says Borno Commissioner. It stated: The Borno State Government would not close public schools over rumours that some strange persons were forcefully administering deadly vaccines on pupils in schools, which led to massive withdrawals of pupils from schools in Maidugri by parents on Thursday. The panic generated by the outbreak of the disease has compelled governments of the seven affected states and other states yet to experience the outbreak to put measures aimed at riding their domains of the disease. In Anambra State, for instance, the state government has inaugurated a committee in all the local government areas and has started sensitization in schools, churches, markets among others.

Nigeria Medical is still being undermined by the poor political commitment to health and health care needs of Nigerians by Nigeria's top political and public office holders. The health sector is also still blighted by poor budgeting for health at federal, state and local government levels. However, public health officials should utilize every available avenue to stem the tide of contagious diseases. Dr. Dorothy Jeff-Nnamani is Managing Director CEO, Novo Health Africa (*Vanguard* Saturday, April 25, 2015 stated: Every contact with a patient serves as an opportunity to provide health education. Educational materials should be available during hospital visitations...Go back to the time we had Ebola scare; everybody had personal responsibility to sanitize. You could hardly spot any Nigerian without their hand sanitizer...There were so many literatures, you could read from the internet and people were well informed.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the American Centre for disease control, among strategies to curb risky health living, include using the entertainment industry as a platform for advocating health information and education is a communication strategy that has become increasingly popular. The most utilized strategy is for health communication professionals to create partnerships with storyline creators so that public health information can be incorporated into within the plot of a television show or movie. The Nigeria Centre for Disease Control should form strong partnership, synergy with Nollywood, Health, and Society, to produce new storylines on television and in film studios to promote public health information. Health issues are not peculiar to the African continent, this is a global concern.

Hence, Bergner (2009:229) noted that: ...influenza...actually kill's more than ten thousand people in the United States each year. Many of its victims are the elderly. Twice over the last hundred years, virulent strains of flu have swept the world in epidemics that killed tens of millions of people each time.

Effective health communication should be targeted at a particular audience and specific situations, such as current outbreak of monkey pox. As well, research into health communication seeks to identify applicable health communication strategies to inform citizens on hygienic ways to enhance their health and to avoid specific contagious diseases.

Among the priority of health communication includes the following:

- Create audience knowledge and awareness of a health issue
- Influence alternative behaviours and attitudes towards a health issue
- Demonstrate to the public health practices
- Illustrate the merits of behavioural changes to public health outcomes
- Advocate a position on a health issues and government policies
- Propagate increase, demand and support for health services, particularly in rural areas
- Refute rumours, lies and misconceptions about public health practices, particularly vaccinations



Creation of public health awareness according to Ezech (2000:424) require: A complete change in our basic attitudes towards the use of our environments. This can be achieved through public enlightenment campaign to educate our people on implications of keeping our surrounding clean... followed by close supervision to ensure penalties were awarded to those who litter the gutters and their surroundings with domestic wastes... Changing our environment to the disadvantage of vectors of diseases.

Likewise, Murray, M; Pizzorno, J (1998:17) views on health are similar to the World Health organization which see health as state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The issue of health and disease often comes down to individual responsibility. It is expedient to be watchful of media marketed products advertisements and influences capable of negatively affecting health, diet, lifestyle and longevity. Steps in achieving ideal health include positive mental attitude, healthy lifestyle, health-promoting diet and supplementary measures such as basic nutritional supplements and physical body care.

Article in *Vanguard*, (Wednesday, October 18, 2017, page 7) By Dayo Johnson, with the headline: Pandemonium as rumour of Vaccination by soldiers hits Ondo, with subheadings: Minister's Reaction, Parents pull down gates, Govt's statement, Army denies vaccination rumour, Police. The article stated: PANDEMONIUM broke out across Ondo State, yesterday, as parents trooped to schools in search of their children and wards, following reports of forced anti-Monkey Pox immunization. Reports had it that some soldiers were going round to force pupils in schools across the state to be immunized.

*Vanguard* (Wednesday, October 18, 2017, page 13) headline Rumour of Army free Immunization disrupts activities in Rivers Schools. It states: There was panic in primary and secondary schools in Rivers State, yesterday following a rumour that the army had stormed schools with free immunization against monkey pox....The rumour of the vaccination caused pandemonium....There was rowdiness in major streets in Port Harcourt as students who were terrified by the news left their classes....Parents were also seen running straight to their children's schools to pick their wards.

In *Vanguard's* ( Wednesday, October 18, 2017, page 28) South East Voice section stated: Through the social media, information began to spread that some people in the army uniform had invaded schools in the region and were injecting pupils with monkey pox virus for the purpose of depopulating South East and South South. Without verifying the authenticity of the information, most parents rushed to their children's schools and demanded to take them home.

*Vanguard* (Tuesday, October 24, 2017, page 34) by Vincent Ujumadu titled Monkey pox Controversy May Impede Battle Against Polio. It stated: Chairman of Nigeria National Polio Plus Committee, Dr. Tunji Funsho said, " Since the news broke out about monkey pox, we have met a brick wall following the allegation that vaccine were meant to wipe out people from certain parts of the country. We have been making effort to debunk it.

As written by Mike Odiegwu and Vincent Ikuomala, in *The Nation* (Tuesday, October 17, 2017, front page) headlined: Monkey Pox: 43 'cases' in Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Enugu with subheading; Patient commits suicide in Bayelsa. This write-up stated: Forty-three suspected monkey pox cases have been reported in eight cases, Minister of Health Prof. Isaac Adewole said yesterday. The states are ; Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Ekiti, Lagos, Enugu, Nasarawa, Rivers, and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Yesterday, a victim of monkey pox receiving

treatment at the University of Niger Delta Teaching Hospital (UNDTH), Okolobiri, Bayelsa State, has committed suicide. It was gathered that the victim, whose name was not disclosed, hanged himself early yesterday.

In *The Guardian* (Friday, October 21, 2017, page 38) captioned: “Children Are More Susceptible To Monkey pox”, Tobi Adwodipe interviewed Prof. Akin Osibogun, renowned Consultant Public Health Physician and Epidemiologist. The excerpts are as follows: Monkey Pox is a rare disease that occurs primarily in remote parts of Central and West Africa, near tropical rainforests. The virus similar to human small-pox(eradicated in the 1980’s), though milder, can be fatal to human beings. The monkey virus( a rare viral zoonosis, member of the orthopox virus genus in the family of Pox viridae) is transmitted to humans from wild animals, even though human to human as secondary transmission could be minimal. Hence the fatality rate is anywhere from 1% to 10%. Victims of fatality have been younger age groups as children. For the moment there is no treatment or vaccine available against the plague.

Human monkey pox was first identified in humans in 1970 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) in a 9 year old boy. Cases have been reported in rural rainforests of the Congo Basin and West Africa. In October, 2016, 26 cases of outbreaks and two deaths were reported but contained in the Central African Republic. How Monkey Pox is transmitted: Index infection occurs from direct contact with the blood, bodily fluids, cutaneous or mucosal lesions of infested animals. In Africa, Human have been documented through the handling of infected monkeys, giant rats, squirrels, rope squirrels, tree squirrels, striped mice, dormice, primates and rodents are the major reservoir of the virus. Secondary which imply human-to-human transmission result from close contact with infected respiratory tract secretions; skin lesions of an infected person and objects recently contaminated by patient fluids or lesions. Droplet of respiratory particles requiring prolonged face-to-face contact is primary pose the greatest danger in human-to-human transmission. This puts family members at great risk.

Congenital monkey pox transmission occurs through inoculation or the placenta. The symptoms is divided into two durations, besides the incubation period of 6 to 16 days or 5 to 21 days, the invasion period (1-5days) is characterized by fever, fever, intense headache, swelling of the lymph node (lymphadenopathy), back pain, muscle ache (myalgia) and intense asthenia (lack of energy). Following the fever, skin eruption,(usually within 1 to 3 days) appear as rashes on the face, palms of the hands and soles of the feet. Evolution of the rash from maculopapules (lesions with flat bases, to vesicles (small fluid-filled blisters), pustules, followed by crusts occurs within 10 days. It takes approximately three weeks for the disappearance of the crusts. Lesions also affect oral mucous membranes, genitalia, eyelid, and cornea (eyeball). DIAGNOSIS: Similar to small pox, chicken pox, measles, bacterial skin infections, scabies, syphilis and medication-associated allergies; monkey pox can be clinically diagnosed in laboratory tests through enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA), antigen detection tests, polymerase chain reaction (PCR) and virus isolation by cell culture.

Vaccination for smallpox has been tested to be 85% effective in preventing monkey pox. Yet this vaccine is no longer in public circulation since smallpox was eradicated in the 1980’s. Among the ways to curb the virus are restrictions on animal trade, ban on small African mammals and monkeys, isolation or quarantine of potentially infected captive animals and handled with utmost standard precautions for observation for 30 days. In order to protect the public during monkey pox outbreaks, people should avoid close contact with infected patients, in the absence of vaccination, the federal, state, local governments in synergy with Centre for

Decease Control (CDC) and the media must raise public awareness of risk factors and educate the public on measures to curb exposure to the virus. Public health and media surveillance and rapid identification of new cases are critical in containing outbreaks.

### **Implications of Monkey Pox Virus Disease to the Nigerian Federation**

Stigmatization of the mere mention of monkey pox in Nigeria sent other nations scampering for safety, cancelations of business conferences, sports engagements, loss of investment, denial of visas, rejection of pilgrims brought would have seem to bring Nigeria's diplomatic status to her lowest ebb. Schools were closed as parents scampered to withdraw their children over rumours of soldiers' forced immunization, several businesses shut their doors as commercial banks screened and sanitized customers. Restaurants, particularly that offering bush meat, game animals on their menu suffered as patrons shied away from such establishment. Families of those quarantined or infected were stigmatised. Ignorance and fear of monkey pox griped Nigeria's landscape as the population drained from looting criminal political class, became overwhelmed with falsehood, rumours, and innuendos fraudulent claims of cure by charlatans, Sharman, herbalists, talisman and plain criminals. Then the unbudgeted financial burden incurred by the federal, state and local governments.

However, similar to the heroism of Dr. Stella Adedevoh, a consultant endocrinologist at First Consultants Clinics, Obalende, Lagos, who treated and was infected by a Liberian, Patrick Sawyer, the index case and saved Nigeria from the 2014 Ebola plaque by her dedication, vigilance, hard work, devotion and professionalism. So far, Nigerian public health professional in various states seem to be towing the professional path of Dr. Adedevoh to contain the epidemics.

With the current wave of monkey pox drifting from state to state, the government should immediately review the State of Emergency provisions and ensure that only provisions strictly required to fight the dread as during Ebola epidemic remain in effect.

However, the fear for resurgence of any contagious diseases, or rumours of nefarious or sinister government complacency in using military vaccines to deplete the populations of some regions of Nigeria have shaken the fate and patriotism of Nigerians to the core. With the fate of citizens so badly demoralized, the damaged psychic of Nigerians over fear of the spread of current wave of monkey pox virus or likewise plague may take a longer duration to heal.

### **CONCLUSION**

Without doubt, the October 2017 outbreak of monkey pox, following the horrors of deaths as a result of the 2014 Ebola plague was one too many contagious disease for Nigerians to bear. The fear and dread generated by the monkey pox virus nearly crippled the psychic of Nigerians. As if the fear of this rare monkey pox disease was not enough, saboteurs utilizing the social media, inciting rumours created plight of frenzied confusion and pandemonium; by spreading lies that soldiers were forcefully inoculating school pupils with the aim to depopulate the South-East and South-South regions of Nigeria. In the frenzied and chaotic stampede to withdraw their children from schools some parents and their wards were involved in vehicular accidents.

As in the Ebola crisis, the media, particularly the printed media as demonstrated by numerous newspaper articles cited in this study were included in the litany of institutions who not only played significant role in attempts to squash

but created far-reaching public awareness of monkey pox virus in Nigeria. Rigorous, persistence and coordinated enforcement of quarantine, sanitisation, and disinfection of premises, political engagement and adequate funding contributed immensely to containing of the monkey pox virus dread in Nigeria. In spite of spirited efforts by federal, state governments, public health officials and military debunking of rumours nefarious inoculations, this applauds the role of the print media. It was media awareness campaigns which lime lighted the plague and galvanized public consciousness. This brought to temporal halt some familial tradition such as frequent hugging, shaking of hands and unsanitary habits and walk about in excessive sun and subsequent sweating.

The media, particularly print media made concerted effort to create public awareness by educating Nigerians on monkey pox virus facts and blatant fabrications. Majority of Nigerians, prone to gullibility, lies of instant miracles, were eager to fall prey, victims to predators, quack herbalists claiming outrageous remedies for monkey pox virus. Had the media not cautioned and educated the public about bogus claims and rumours, besides the Bayelsa State patient who committed suicide, deaths would have been recorded. Hence the public health crackdown and containment of monkey pox virus in Africa's populous nation, just as the Ebola crisis serves as imitable model for the world. Through the agenda-setting role by showcasing the serious public health, national security, economic threat posed by monkey pox virus in attaching prominence to monkey pox virus news, post monkey pox virus readiness of public health professionals, government health ministry should aptly be credited to media sensitization.

### **Contributions to Knowledge**

- The ability to draw global attention of Nigerian allies, Doctors without Borders, the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, governments and other foreign sympathetic agencies to the plight of Nigerians over the monkey pox virus, is probably the commendation of this study.
- The ability of this exercise to bring to international limelight the agenda setting, social responsibility, and environmentally surveillance roles of the Nigerian media, in sensitising citizens and proffering preventions for monkey pox virus is notable.
- In spite of being classified as a developing nation of the African continent, the position of this paper portrayed Nigerian government, public health officials and the media as vanguards of national protectors against contagious viruses. It demonstrates that the Nigerian authorities and particularly the print media are capable of curbing public health emerging challenges.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Guardian (Saturday, October 21, 2017, page 13) titled : FG, WDF Set Up 390 Diabetes Clinics Nationwide as written by Franka Osakwe : The federal Government said it has, in partnership with the World Diabetes Federation (WDF), established about 390 diabetes clinics in different parts of the country address the growing problem of diabetes, which experts say, has assumed an epidemic proportion in Nigeria. It is the prerogative of all internet, print and broadcast media to create public awareness, public service announcements in line with the following:



1. Government should set up public health educational messages and awareness. Such messages should focus on reducing the risk of infection from human-to-human.
2. Close physical contact with monkey pox infected people should be avoided.
3. Gloves and protective equipment should be worn while taking care of patients, and regular hand washing.
4. All bush animals should be thoroughly cooked to avoid animal-to-human transmission.
5. Gloves and the appropriate protective clothing should be worn while handling sick or infected animals including during slaughter.
6. Samples of human blood or animals infected with monkey pox should be handled by trained staff and public health officials.
7. Instead of harping on not eating bush meat, the government and health officials should lay emphasis on sanitation and hygiene.
8. Instead of destroying the business of bush meat selling, the government should instruct the public to 'well done' cook their meat to guarantee that any bacteria or virus is killed in the cooking process.
9. Media blitz should target schools, offices, banks, government agencies, plane/bus terminals and public places. This will ensure precautionary sanitation posters, handbills and trained personnel on hand.
10. This qualitative discourse postulate intensification of both electronic and print public health reporting, public health communication analysis and designation of special newspaper columns solely dedicated to daily health reportage. The study recognizes and recommends the need for formal and systematized training of mass communication students in public health communication while providing a systematic, rigorous and conceptually grounded training for public health leaders, practitioners, and researchers.

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