



Received: 17 January 2024

Revised: 7 April 2024

Accepted: 20 April 2024

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LAW & SOCIAL POLICY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Legal Issues Concerning Compulsory COVID-19 Vaccination: Nigeria as a Case Study

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Abstract: It is no news that COVID-19 has rendered severe havoc in the global environment. Although, various medical scientists and scholars were able to find a possible curtailment (Through vaccination) of the deadly COVID-19, however, there seems to be fear of the negative medical outcome of being vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccine, given several claims of the potential danger. Furthermore, it suffices to state that Nigeria has also had its fair share of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, to curtail the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria, the Nigerian government sorts to make vaccination compulsory, despite the legal and medical rights of its citizens as enshrined in the constitution and judicial precedent. It is in this regard, that this study sort to adopt a hybrid method of study concerning the legal issues of compulsory vaccination in Nigeria. Concerning this, 310 questionnaires were sent to respondents residing in Nigeria. The study therefore found that there were incidences of COVID-19 in Nigeria and there are laws concerning the control of infectious disease in Nigeria. However, the study further found that it is a legal misnomer to compel an individual forcefully against his/her wishes to be vaccinated. Therefore, the study concludes and recommends that for effective vaccination against COVID-19, the Nigerian government needs to avoid forceful vaccination, but rather a wide sensitization concerning the vaccine's potency as against the negative claim concerning the COVID-19 vaccine.

Keywords: Legal; COVID-19; Vaccination;

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2019, the global environment was struck with a deadly virus known as COVID-19 (Luo, M. et al, 2020) and healthcare in various countries was overwhelmed by the pandemic (Pastorino et al., 2022, p. 204). COVID-19 is a severe respiratory disease that is highly contagious and it is often caused by SARS-CoV-2 (Cucinotta and Vanelli, 2020). The COVID-19 disease is contagious and can easily spread to an individual by an infected person's or animal's dropping (Raudenská, J., et al, 2020). Although, the origin and cause of the COVID-19 disease is said to be obscure, considering the claim and counterclaim of its origin and cause (Ameh, et al, 2021).

However, given the threat of the continuous spread of the COVID-19 pandemic within the global environment, medical scientists and academic scholars have resulted to finding possible curtailment of the deadly COVID-19 disease (D'errico, et al, 2021). Although, several vaccines (Messenger RNA (Mrna), Vector vaccine, and Protein subunit vaccine) were developed to further curtail the COVID-19 pandemic (Nisa and Giger, 2012). However, there seem to be claims that the COVID-19 vaccine is capable of altering human DNA and reducing the life span of the receiver of the vaccine (Cioffi and Rinaldi, 2020). Furthermore, there was also a claim that the COVID-19 vaccine was majorly developed to reduce the overgrowing population of Africa, hence (Gostin and Hodge, 2020), the fear of most individuals of the unknown when vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccine (Masnun, et al, 2021).

Concerning the above, it suffices to state that Nigeria has also had its fair share of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is concerning the fact that on the 27th of February 2020, there was a confirmed case of the coronavirus at Lagos State Teaching Hospital by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) (Ogundokun, et al, 2020). However, the NCDC seems to announce to Nigerians that all necessary step is being undertaken to curtail the impact of COVID-19 (Adekunle, et al, 2020). Despite the assurances from the NCDC, there was a tremendous increase in cases of COVID-19 in Nigeria and the Nigerian government tends to seek for international support to curtail the deadly disease (Ilesanmi and Fagbule, 2020). However, to forestall the further spread of the COVID-19



disease, the Nigerian government sorts to through policy enforce a compulsory COVID-19 vaccination. However, this procedure is contrary to sections 35, 40, 41, 42, and 45 of the Nigerian constitution save with the exception as stipulated in the said section. Furthermore, it is worth noting that neither the Quarantine Act, (Quarantine Act Cap Q2 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004) nor the COVID-19 Regulation (COVID-19 Regulation, 2020) enacted in Nigeria stipulate a compulsory COVID-19 vaccination. Concerning the above, the study tends to embark on a hybrid method of study in examining the legal issues of compulsory vaccination in Nigeria and its challenges. The study will further suggest possible solutions to ensuring voluntary compliance with COVID-19 vaccination in Nigeria.

2. Methodology

Given the scope of the study, a hybrid method (involving a doctrinal and non-doctrinal) of research methodology was adopted. The essence of the doctrinal is to theorize and examine the legal framework and issues as it concerns compulsory vaccination in Nigeria. In this regard, the study relied on various primary and secondary legal literatures which include; laws, judicial authority, textbooks, journals, and online articles. Furthermore, concerning the non-doctrinal method of study, it is aimed at ascertaining and verifying the incidence of COVID-19 in Nigeria and legal issues concerning compulsory vaccination in Nigeria. If the citizens of Nigeria are comfortable with the compulsory COVID-19 vaccination, how possible can Nigeria? Furthermore, it also aims at ensuring how Nigerians can ensure there is effective and voluntary compliance with the COVID-19 vaccination.

3. Results

3.1. The conceptual issue concerning COVID-19 and the Quest for Compulsory Vaccination

Thought it suffices to state that before 2019 that the global environment has been battling with several diseases such as HIV, Cholera, Ebola, Chickenpox, monkeypox influenza viruses, Human papillomavirus (HPV), Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), yellow fever, severe dengue, Hepatitis A and B (Beccia, et al, 2021). However, in 2019 the global environment was struck and put on hold by a deadly and contagious Coronal virus (Amantea, et al, 2022). COVID-19 is a often result of severe respiratory illness, fever accompanies by shortness of breath and persistent coughing (Beccia, et al, 2022). Severe COVID-19 often leads to a patient having a damaged kidney and heart, depending on the severity of the infection (Feng and LI, 2021). Although, the global environment through several organizations and healthcare providers try to curtail the spread, however, the virus was spreading more than expected (Crum and Mooney, 2021).

However, like every other virus, COVID-19 is capable of transboundary infection (Aini and Gunawan, 2021, P. 35). In this regard, Nigeria was affirming to its citizens that all necessary measure has been put in place to prevent COVID-19 and any infected person moving into Nigeria (Ola, et al, 2020) ; (Aidonioje, et al, 2022). On 27th of February, 2020, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), confirm a case of COVID-19 disease at the Lagos State Teaching Hospital (Ogundokun, et al, 2020). Upon discovering the confirmed case of the COVID-19 virus in Nigeria, the NCDC swung to curtailing the further spread of the disease (Ayo, et al, 2021). However, from just a confirmed case, on September 2020 Nigeria recorded cases of 58,848 and 1,112 death of infected individuals with the COVID-19 virus (Adebowale, et al, 2022). The spread of the COVID-19 virus became so severe that the Nigeria healthcare system became overwhelmed with individuals with the COVID-19 virus and citizens of Nigeria were left stranded without help (Ifijeh, et al, 2021).

In quest of curtailing the incidence of the COVID-19 virus in Nigeria, there was an outcry by the general public and the Nigerian government seeking the international community for assistance (Machingaidze and Wiysonge, 2021). Although, there was aid from the international community through the aid of medical scientists who discover and develop various vaccines to help boost immunity against the COVID-19 virus (Goldberg, 2022). However, the majority of Nigerian citizens appear hesitant to receive the vaccine, driven by numerous claims regarding its dangers (Waztl, 2022, p. 692). Some of these claims are outline as follows:

- I. The claim that COVID-19 vaccines could have severe fertility effects in male and female
- II. There was also the claim that the COVID-19 vaccines can change or alter the genome of the individual being vaccinated
- III. That even with the COVID-19 vaccination an individual can still be infected
- IV. That COVID-19 is just a variant of the common cold
- V. The COVID-19 lifespan of the individual being vaccinated
- VI. Furthermore, there was also a claim that the COVID-19 vaccine was majorly developed to reduce the overgrowing population of Africa,

In this regard, the above claim necessitated the blatant rejection of being vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccine. However, in order to ensure effective compliance of vaccinating Nigerian citizens with the COVID-19 vaccine, the Nigerian government sort to introduce a strategic plan and directive, in requesting a compulsory vaccination. There were several circulars that individuals without proof of being vaccinated should not be allowed to gain access in most government and private establishments, undermining the fundamental rights of the Nigerian citizens enshrined in the constitution.

3.2. Laws Concerning COVID-19 and Vaccination in Nigeria

The Nigerian constitution (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2011) is the major law and superior law that govern Nigeria. However, concerning issues of infectious disease such as COVID-19, section 17(1)(c) of the Nigerian constitution (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2011) provide that the action taken by the Nigerian government should be humane. In this regard, section 17(3) of the Nigerian constitution (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2011) stipulate that the Nigerian government should direct its policy towards the provision of adequate health and medical facilities to all individual or persons residing in Nigeria. Furthermore, section 35(1)(e) of the Nigerian constitution (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2011) stipulates that the Nigerian government can take drastic measures in depriving an individual of their liberty, where such an individual is suffering from contagious and infectious diseases. Although, the reason for restraining such individuals is to enable the government to commence treatment of the infected persons and prevent the possible spread of the said disease.

Though the Nigerian constitution is said to be the major and superior law, however, it suffices to state that it is not a primary law that regulates infectious diseases such as COVID-19. In this regard, there are other basic laws concerning the control and curtailment of infectious diseases. One such law is the National Health Act (National Health Act, 2014), the law is a primary law concerning the regulation of health issues in Nigeria. Sections 4, 6, and 9 of the National Health Act, it establishes the National Health Council and various technical committee to ensure an effective provision and coordination of health issues as concern public and private healthcare providers in Nigeria.

However, a relevant provision of law as it concerns vaccination is section 11(3)(b) of the National Health Act. This section provides for the establishment of a healthcare trust fund and further stipulates that 20% of funds should be utilized in financing the purchase of vaccines and other medical essentials for healthcare purposes.

Furthermore, there is also the existence of the Quarantine Act, (Quarantine Act Cap Q2 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004) the essence of the quarantine act is to curtail the spread of contagious and infectious diseases, by restricting and confining such infected persons to a particular place for proper treatment. Section 15-17 of the Act, (Quarantine Act Cap Q2 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004) stipulates the procedure the Nigerian government must adopt in quarantine of a ship and infected persons suffering from a contagious disease. However, it suffices to state that section 4 of the Act seems to be striking in the fact that the Nigerian government can make regulations in determining the step to initiate in curtailing and controlling a contagious and infectious disease. Concerning the above, it suffices to state that section 4 of the Quarantine Act, seems to specify some modalities and measures that allow or empower the Nigerian government to adopt compulsory vaccination in Nigeria. However, it is apt to state that in making any regulation

as it concerns the regulation of COVID-19, must not conflict with the intendment of the Nigeria constitution that safeguards the rights of citizens.

Concerning the power confer on the Nigerian government, by sections 2, 3, & 4 of the Quarantine Act, (Quarantine Act Cap Q2 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004) the COVID-19 Regulation was passed by the Nigerian government. (COVID-19 Regulation, 2020) A cursory review of the COVID-19 pandemic shows that the measure adopted by the Nigerian government in curtailing the contagious and infectious COVID-19 was through the restriction/cessation of movement in most and several parts of Nigeria. Furthermore, the COVID-19 Regulation also required an immediate and prompt report of any suspected cases of persons suffering from the COVID-19 virus to any of the closest branches of the National Centre for Disease Control (Omaka Amari, 2020). Also, paragraph 27 of the COVID-19 Health (Coronal Virus Disease (COVID-19), 2021) Protection Regulation, further provides that where there is a confirmed case of an individual infected with the contagious COVID-19, the Nigerian government through the relevant agencies must take precautionary measures to confine and isolate such individual for proper control and management of the disease.

Concerning the above, a cursory review of the Nigerian constitution and various laws that tend to provide for the regulation of infectious disease and vaccination shows that no provision deals with or provides for compulsory vaccination. In this regard, a compulsory COVID-19 vaccination in Nigeria has generated serious legal issues of violating the constitutional rights of its citizens. However, although no law tends to require compulsory vaccination in Nigeria, the Nigerian government has sought to restrict and prohibit anyone yet to be vaccinated from entry, working, and having access to government and private establishments.

3.3. Legal Issues And Challenges Concerning Compulsory Vaccination In Nigeria

As observed above, concerning the contagious nature and widespread of the COVID-19 diseases, the Nigerian government sort to seek for international support. In this regard, Nigeria opted for several vaccines (Messenger RNA (Mrna), Vector vaccine, and Protein subunit vaccine) to curtail the COVID-19 pandemic. Some claims suggest that the COVID-19 vaccine can alter human DNA and shorten the recipient's lifespan. Additionally, there's an assertion that Africa was targeted due to its large population. Moreover, both the vaccine manufacturer and the Nigerian government's assurances regarding its efficacy were vague and ambiguous. These factors contribute to the widespread fear and rejection of the COVID-19 vaccine among most Nigerians. However, the Nigerian government sought to through policy strictly and compulsorily compel Nigerians in receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. However, it suffices to state that the Nigerian government resorting to compulsory COVID-19 vaccination further generates legal issues of undermining the rights of its citizens. Furthermore, there was also a claim that the COVID-19 vaccine was majorly developed to reduce the overgrowing population of Africa, hence, the fear of most individuals of the unknown when vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccine.

Concerning the above, it suffices to state that issue of protection of the health of the Nigerian citizen is recognized and guaranteed by the Nigerian constitution, judicial precedent, and various laws. This is concerning the fact that sec 33 of the Nigerian constitution aptly stated that No Nigerian citizen shall be deprived of the exercise of their right to life intentionally, except where a court has passed a death sentence on such person by the law. Furthermore, section 35(1) of the Nigerian constitution, guarantees the right to personal liberty. That no Nigerian citizens should be deprived of the right to their liberty, except by the law.

Furthermore, it suffices to state that the Nigerian National Health Act, (Nigerian National Health Act, 2014) Quarantine Act, (Quarantine Act Cap Q2 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004) and the COVID-19 Regulation, though regulate issues concerning contagious and infectious diseases such as COVID-19. However, there is no provision within these laws that provides for compulsory vaccination of Nigerian citizens. Hence, a legal misnomer to compel compulsory COVID-19 vaccination of Nigerian citizens.

However, it should also be noted that concerning the dispute of medical negligence, rule 19 Part A of the Nigeria Code of Medical Ethics aptly makes it a prerequisite for Nigeria

medical practitioners to always obtain and seek the consent of their patients or their relations before embarking on any medical treatment. The Code further stipulated a failure of a medical practitioner to obtain an approval or consent will result in medical negligence which will warrant the injured and aggrieved patient to institute a suit for medical negligence against the medical practitioner. In the case of *Otti V Excel-C Medical Centre Ltd.* (11NWLR (Part 1698), 2019) the court aptly held and stated that an hospital or medical professional owes its patient a fundamental duty of care concerning the procedure or method adopted for the medical treatment of their patient. The court further stated that where a standard of skill and duty is required of a reasonable medical professional, who falls short, such medical practitioner will be held liable for a tort of negligence.

Furthermore, it must be noted that the health and life of every Nigerian are very cogent that the law will seek to protect it at all times from any form of violation emanating from either the government or any individual. This position of the law has been aptly captured in the case of *Esabunor V Faweya*, (7 NWLR (Part 1698), 2019) where the court aptly and emphatically reiterated that Nigerian law exists to primarily secure and protect life and preserve the fundamental rights of its citizens. The court will take a bold and intrinsic step in securing and guaranteeing the rights of its citizen whenever there is a threat and violation of Nigerian citizens' rights within its territory.

3.4. Presentation and Analysis of Data

Concerning the questionnaire distributed to the various respondents in this study, the data extracted from the response of the respondents to the questionnaire is therefore presented and analyzed as follows the sample size and techniques. To achieve a better, sufficient, and wider scope of response on the questionnaire by the respondents residing in Nigeria, the study's sample size further focused and utilized 310 respondents residing in the various geo-political part or zone in Nigeria.

However, a simple random method of sampling was adopted in this study in selecting or identifying the respondents to respond to the questions. The essence of adopting or using the simple method of sampling is concerning the fact that the method is considered more preferably in reaching out to more audiences. (Aidonojie, 2022, p. 40; Idahosa et al., 2023, p. 78; Aidonojie and Francis, 2022, p. 68; Majekodunmi et al. 2022, p. 132; Aidonojie et al., 2023, p. 58; Majekodunmi et al. 2022, 9; Oladele et al. 2022, 28; Aidonojie, 2023, p. 6; Aidonojie, 2023, p. 20). Furthermore, a simple random sampling technique is said to possess the following relevance and advantages (Aidonojie et al., 2022, p. 73; Aidonojie et al. 2021, p. 165; Aidonojie et al., 2022, p. 215; Aidonojie et al., 2022, p. 138; Aidonojie et al., 2022, p. 118; Aidonojie and Edetalehn, 2023, p. 3).

- I. That is more suitable in the selection of respondents from a heterogenous inhabitants or population
- II. The result often arrived at using a simple random method of sampling is often unprejudiced, fair, and dispassionate
- III. It is often less difficult and free of any form of complications
- IV. That it is preferably in a hybrid method of legal research (Aidonojie et al., 2022, p. 64; Majekodunmi et al. 2022; Aidonojie et al., 2022, p. 187; Aidonojie, 2022, p. 65).
- V. Data Analysis

Concerning the questionnaire distributed to the respondents, the results obtained is therefore presented and analyzed in graphical and tabular form as follows:

Table 1: Identification of the residential area of the respondents are valid representations of the respondents identifying the various location they reside in Nigeria.

S/N	Geopolitical Zones in Nigeria	Responses of Respondents	Percent
1	North Central	24	7.7%
2	North East	34	1.1%
3	North West	26	8.4%
4	South East	78	25.2%
5	South South	80	25.8%
6	South West	68	21.9%
	TOTAL	310	100%

Table 2: Respondents identifying if there is an incidence of COVID-19 in Nigeria

	Response	Percent
Valid Yes	262	84.5%
Valid No	48	15.5%
Total	310	100%

Table 3: Challenges in curtailing the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria

Challenges in Curtailing the Spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria	Cluster of Response	Percentage
Unconducive and insufficient isolations centre for Covid-19 patient	204	75.8%
Poor information dissemination concerning Covid-19 Patient	248	92.2%
Poor implementation of Covid-19 laws and policies in curtailing the spread of the diseases	151	56.1%
Non-availability of medical drugs for the treatment of a patient	160	59.5%
Conspiracy and corruption among COVID-19 force or frontline workers	133	49.4%

Table 4: Clarification by respondents if vaccination can aid in curtailing COVID-19 in Nigeria

	Response	Percent
Valid Yes	205	66.6%
Valid No	103	33.4%
Total	308	100%

Table 5: Respondents verifying if compulsory COVID-19 vaccination should be allowed in Nigeria

	Response	Percent
Valid Yes	34	11%
Valid No	274	89%
Total	308	100%

Table 6: Identification of ways in ensuring there is effective compliance with COVID-19 vaccination

Strategy in ensuring compliance with COVID-19 vaccination	Cluster of Responses	Percentage
Sensitization of the general public concerning the reliability and potency of the COVID-19 vaccine	199	75.4%
Sensitization of dangers non-being vaccinated	224	84.8%
Provision of adequate health centre for COVID-19 vaccination	164	62.1%
Provision of free COVID-19 vaccination	180	68.2%
Providing incentives and insurance for COVID-19 frontline workers to gear their effort in working effectively	173	65.5%

4. Discussion

The data obtained in this study through the use of a questionnaire is therefore presented and analysed below. Figure 1 and Table 1, shows that the 310 respondents who responded to the questionnaire are Nigerians who reside in the various geo-political zone in Nigeria. In this regard, it is apt to state that the respondents being Nigerian are well equipped and informed to reiterate an informed response as it concern COVID-19 vaccination and the legal issues concerning compulsory COVID-19 vaccination in Nigeria. In this regard, in Table 2 and Figure 2, 84.5% of the respondent were able to identify that there are incidences of COVID-19 and it has overwhelmed the healthcare system in Nigeria. Furthermore, in Table 3 and Figure 3, the respondents further identify the challenges that result in curtailing the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria as follows;

- i. 75.8% of the respondents stated that there is an uncondusive and insufficient isolations centre for Covid-19 patient
- ii. 92.2% identify poor information dissemination concerning Covid-19 diseases in Nigeria
- iii. 56.1% agreed that there was poor implementation of Covid-19 laws and policies in curtailing the spread of the diseases
- iv. 59.5% also stated that there was non-availability of medical drugs for the treatment of a patient, hence the spread
- v. Furthermore, 49.4% further agreed that conspiracy and corruption among COVID-19 forces or frontline workers resulted in the spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria.

Concerning the above challenges, in Figure 4 and Table 4, 66.6% of the respondents stated that the COVID-19 vaccine is a better medical strategy to curtail the spread of COVID-19. This finding is similar to Ifijeh et al. statement in the study that stated that to curtail the incidence of COVID-19 in Nigeria, the government sort request from international support through the supply of COVID-19 vaccine. Though there was international aid concerning the shipping of the COVID-19 vaccine to Nigeria, however, the Nigerian government sought to require a compulsory COVID-19 vaccination. In this regard, in Figure 5 and Table 5, 89% of the respondents further disagreed concerning compulsory vaccination in Nigeria. However, in Figure 6 and Table 6, the respondent further identify possible ways of ensuring effective compliance with the COVID-19 vaccination in Nigeria, instead of the usual force;

- i. 75.4% of the respondents stated that there is a need for effective sensitization of the general public concerning the reliability and potency of the COVID-19 vaccine
- ii. 84.8% identify sensitization of dangers non-being vaccinated, which could aid in ensuring effective compliance
- iii. 62.1% agreed that there should be the provision of adequate health centre for COVID-19 vaccination
- iv. 68.2% also stated that the provision of free COVID-19 vaccination could encourage a large turn-over of individuals being vaccinated
- v. Furthermore, 65.5% stated that providing incentives and insurance for COVID-19 frontline workers to gear their effort in working effectively

5. Conclusion

The study has been able to emphasize the deadly nature of COVID-19 that struck the global environment. In this regard, global healthcare was overwhelmed as a result of the sporadic spread of the virus. However, several scientists and medical academic scholars were able to develop various vaccines to curtail the spread of the COVID-19 disease, but the claims and threat that the COVID-19 vaccine could pose severe health dangers have resulted in various resistance from several individuals from being vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccine.

However, the study further emphasizes the fact that Nigeria has also had its fair share of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although, the Nigeria government through international aid was able to procure the COVID-19 vaccine, however, given the said claim of the COVID-19 vaccines, particularly on the reduction of the African population, several Nigerian citizens seem to refuse to be vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccine. The study further reveals that the Nigerian government in ensuring effective compliance with the COVID-19 vaccination, tends to through directive instruct a forceful and compulsory vaccination of Nigerian citizens. The study further reveals that a forced and compulsory vaccination of the Nigerian citizen as directed by the Nigerian government is a complete legal aberration and a misnomer contemplated in the Nigerian constitution and various health laws.

Concerning the above, it suffices to state that the Nigerian government should note that the issue of vaccination is built on trust based on properly disseminated information as it concerns the safety and potency of the COVID-19 vaccine. This is concerning the fact that it is very easy to undermine and bridge the trust of its citizens with false and unfounded claims. Furthermore, a compulsory COVID-19 vaccination would further strengthen the false claim that lay the foundation of distrust between the Nigerian government and its citizen. In this regard, it is required that for effective compliance of being vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccine, the Nigerian government needs to embark on an open and effective means of communication concerning the safety and potency of the COVID-19 vaccine.

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