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**OVERPOPULATION AND COMMUNICABLE DISEASE OCCURRENCE
AMONG STUDENTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN IBADAN OYO STATE**

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Abstract

Class size in every school system all over the world is very important with respect to the health status of students in the school. In Nigeria, large classes consist of classrooms with more than the maximum acceptable standard of forty student per class. Large classes therefore are likely to put students at greater risk of injury, reduce learning and increase the possibility of contracting infectious diseases. Other conditions include nutrition, personal hygiene, environmental sanitation, the quality of school building and health care services available in schools, that would influence the health of students. It is however a fact that students come to school with a lot of health problems most of which are infectious in nature and are transmissible through contact especially in an overpopulated classroom. The study therefore, examines the effect of overpopulation on the occurrence of communicable diseases in secondary schools in Ibadan, Oyo State. A sample of one thousand (1000) respondents were used for the study. Data were collected using questionnaire while data analysis involved the use of frequency counts and percentages. The result showed that overpopulation predisposed student to communicable diseases. The findings have implications for policy makers, educators and all stake holders interested in the health and well being of students.

Introduction

The link between overpopulation and incidence of disease occurrence are well established. In Nigeria, haphazard development, lack of physical structures, dilapidated classrooms and laboratories, poverty, poor municipal solid waste management and uncontrollable population growth rate are few examples of human activities that degrade the environment and pose a threat to human health through increase the susceptibility to infectious disease that are life threatening in schools. Willgoose and Blank (1999) reported that the complexities of modern life and the numerous forms of environmental hazards and pollution combine to make the task of preventing illness and protecting illness school health a major challenge. The issue of overpopulation or crowded school environment is equally a threat to the health of the school- aged child. Overpopulation in schools could be explained in terms of thickly populated classrooms whose numbers clearly out weighs existing facilities in this classrooms. It is evident that classrooms that are overpopulated experience the highest rates of disease occurrence while communicable diseases and debilitating illness are higher among students who sit close to one another.

Franklin (1976) noted that the public health movement of the late 19th century identified the issues of poverty, poor sanitation and over crowding as major predisposing factors to communicable disease. Council of Michigan Foundation (CMT) (2008) noted that bacteria and viruses that cause meningitis are spread by direct contact with nose and throat secretions, usually through kissing, coughing, sneezing and sharing drinks, cigarettes and food. They stated further that children aged under four years, adolescents and young adults aged 15-24 are at higher risk than others to Meningococcal disease. This condition could be worsened in over -populated /overcrowded classrooms where students sit closely together. It should be emphasized that our health is affected by the health of the others and the strength of the effect depends on the scope of interactions between people. Crowded classroom will lead to high level of person to person contact which leaves the children vulnerable to communicable diseases.

Ice, Ready and Welner (2002) stated that school size is measured in terms of total numbers of students, while school overcrowding is measured in terms of the number of students enrolled compared to the number the facilities it was originally designed to serve. A more logical definition of overcrowding is that given by the National Center for Education statistics (NCES) (2002) which considers a school overcrowded when the number of students enrolled in the school is larger than what the school was designed to accommodate. The health of the children in such situation will be in double jeopardy.

Health is undoubtedly an important factor in any human endeavour and as a matter of fact has become a major objective in education, because, if a child is to get the most benefit from his schooling, he must be healthy. But on the contrary, school and to a large extent classroom environment have become sources for epidemic spread of infectious diseases, such as measles, chickenpox, rubella and diarrheal diseases as a result of the over crowded nature of these schools / classrooms. A child needs to be healthy to learn and he that is educated knows how to stay healthy. Olaniran, Akpan, Ikpeme and Udofia (1995) observed that the quality of health enjoyed by an individual cannot be dissociated from the quality of the environment in which such an individual lives. It is therefore imperative that if an individual wants to enjoy good health he should live in a clean, safe and healthy environment. Most schools recognize their responsibilities to provide education in an environment that is safe and protects the well being of their staff and students, while others do not. They would rather admit

students in such large numbers that the facilities in school would not carry. This action unfortunately causes more harm than good, in the lives of the students by predisposing them to injuries and illness.

It is however, important to note that the burden of illness is to a large extent the concern of parents in particular and societies in general. It includes not only the suffering, pain, discomfort of each sick person, the grief and anguish of relatives and friends but also the burden on the family in caring for and accommodating a sick member in the household. However, on every school day, parents send their children to school with the hopes that they will be healthy and safe to receive adequate education. A variety of environmental risks may be posed in schools that can make these students potentially unsafe and unhealthy and hinder their abilities to learn. World Health Organization (2004) pointed out that healthy school environment can directly improve children's health and effective learning and thereby contribute to the development of healthy adults as skilled and productive members of society. Class size is an obvious factor that can make the environment unhealthy for the children and predispose them to communicable diseases. The researchers therefore, are of the view that overpopulation in class could likely be a strong indicator of communicable disease transmission.

Specifically, the study provided answers to the research question: Would overcrowding predispose students to communicable disease in Ibadan, Oyo State?

METHODOLOGY

The study sample comprised one thousand (1000) respondents drawn from twenty (20) secondary schools using simple random sampling techniques. The instrument used in collecting data was a self developed structured questionnaire with a reliability estimate of 0.88. The instrument was administered directly to the respondents by the researchers. Data analysis involved the use of frequency counts and percentages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Analysis of overpopulation as a predisposing factor to communicable disease

Variable	Respondent	Yes	%	No	%	Total	%
Over population in class as a predisposing factor to communicable disease	Male	380	76	120	24	500	100
	Female	470	94	30	06	500	100

Table 1 showed that 380 (76%) male respondents agreed that an over populated/crowded class could be responsible for communicable disease transmission in schools while 120 (24%) disagreed. As for females 470 (94%) agreed that over populated class could predispose the students to communicable disease while 30 (06%) disagreed.

The above result shows that overpopulation in schools could affect the health of the students. Infectious disease organisms that are spread from person to person or injected into the environment can lead to outbreaks in school and childcare settings. It further confirmed that infectious diseases can spread among children in schools and child care centers due to congestion in classes. Class size is evidently linked with communicable disease spread because when the class is overcrowded with children, the class then becomes a brooding place for infectious diseases.

At the time of administering the instrument the researchers observed that in many schools students sat on the floor to receive lessons as a result of inadequate furniture. The floors were broken and not properly cemented resulting in constant dust in the air and the provision of a conducive environment for ticks and rats. The broken floors also provide a conducive habitat for ticks, rats etc which are veritable sources of infectious diseases that may likely predispose the students to skin problems. This result highly correlated with Willgoose and Blank (1999) report that the complexities of modern life and the numerous forms of environmental hazards and pollution combine to make the task of preventing illness and protecting school health a major challenge. There is potential for children to be infected at school due to overpopulation in class. Therefore, it is important to minimize children's exposure to such risk factors by enrolling only the number the school facility can accommodate.

CONCLUSION

It is not an understatement to say that overcrowding/overpopulation has been a serious problem in most of our public schools. A classroom environment where too many students sit together to learn is likely to predispose them to infectious and other health related problems. It is noteworthy that the number of students in a class can affect the condition of the environment of the classroom especially where proper ventilation is not possible. An apparent implication of this study, therefore, is the need for a policy that would ensure harmony between enrolment and availability of quality facilities. Parents should be encouraged to enroll their children/wards in schools with low population and better facilities. All tiers of government and private proprietors of schools should provide conducive teaching/learning environment for both the teachers and students.

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