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12 WHO IS FOOLING WHO? MASKING UP AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON ZIMBABWEAN SOCIETY

Abstract

The world has witnessed the high infection and fatality rates of the corona virus which has resulted in the World Health Organisation declaring it a pandemic on 11 March 2020. As of 13 March 2022, there were over 455 million confirmed cases and over 6 million deaths that had been reported globally (WHO, 2022). In order to curb the spread of this pandemic and its spiral effects, countries have come up with mitigatory measures; among them is the wearing of face masks. This paper has been prompted by the failure to comply by the majority of Zimbabweans to the wearing of face masks, thus making it a criminal offence not to wear one. Thus, most Zimbabweans tend to wear face masks as a ritual – for fear of prosecution by the police or when the masks allow them to access certain benefits but not as a COVID-19 mitigation strategy. The chapter also further interrogates why even among those who police the wearing of face masks seem to be at liberty to remove their masks as and when they choose. In the midst of a pandemic, the question, which remains, is -who is fooling who? The chapter thus endeavours to investigate why Zimbabweans in general appear to have rejected the wearing of face masks. The research is largely qualitative in nature and a sample of purposively selected people from Harare's CBD area were interviewed. Furthermore, the observations of Zimbabweans as they go about their daily business and their understanding of face masks were used. It is hoped that the people's perceptions about the face mask are brought to the fore and put under the spotlight for the benefit of the general populace. The chapter also accounts for the socio-economic and religious reasons behind non-compliance of wearing masks, hoping that this mitigation strategy is taken seriously. The study is informed by *Ubuntu/Unhu* philosophy, which calls for people of African cultural descent to protect and act in harmony with their communities as well as avoid hypocritical tendencies that are self-harming or which harm others.

Keywords: COVID-19, mitigation, face mask, *Ubuntu*, pandemic, infectious, fatality rate, Zimbabwe, Harare, curb

Introduction

The novel corona virus disease or COVID-19 which was first discovered in Wuhan in China in December 2019 has ravaged the world causing numerous deaths with no cure in sight. China reported this mysterious pneumonia to the World Health Organisation (WHO) on 31 December 2019 (Mukherjee & Dias, 2020). In order to curb the spread of this pandemic and its spiral effects, countries came up with mitigatory measures; among them was the wearing of face masks. This paper was prompted by the failure to comply by the majority of Zimbabweans to the wearing of face masks, hence, instigating government to make it a criminal offence not to wear one. Most Zimbabweans tended to wear face masks as a ritual; for fear of prosecution by the police or when the masks allowed them to access certain benefits but not as a COVID-19 mitigation strategy. The chapter also further interrogates why even among those who police the wearing of face masks seemed to be at liberty to remove their masks as and when they chose. In the midst of a pandemic, the question which remains is -who is fooling who? The chapter, therefore, endeavours to investigate why Zimbabweans in general appeared to have rejected the wearing of face masks. The research is largely qualitative in nature and a sample of purposively selected people from Harare's CBD area were interviewed. It is hoped that the people's perceptions about the face mask are brought to the fore and put under the spotlight for the benefit of the general populace. The chapter also accounts for the socio-economic and religious reasons behind non-compliance of wearing masks, hoping that this mitigation strategy is taken seriously. The study is informed by *Ubuntu/Unhu* philosophy which calls for people of African cultural descent to protect and act in harmony with their communities as well as avoid hypocritical tendencies that are self-harming or which harm others.

Background to masking up and mitigation against the spread of COVID-19

In March 2020, Zimbabwe recorded its first COVID-19 case which was from a foreign traveller who had visited the resort town of Victoria Falls (Cassim, 2020: n.p). In the same month the country recorded its first COVID-19 death of a son of a prominent businessman who had just travelled to New York for medical check-up (Chipunza & Marunya, 2020: n.p).

After realising that the virus had reached the country's shores, the Government of Zimbabwe then recommended the use of face masks among other measures, to prevent the spread of the virus. In Zimbabwe, the initial use of face masks in April 2020 as a mitigatory strategy was not mandatory. Masks were supposed to be worn by health personnel taking care of a person with suspected COVID-19 infection and by those who were coughing or sneezing (Ministry of Health and Child Care – MoHCC, 2020). This measure was in line with the WHO's recommendation that the wearing of face masks was only for healthcare workers and those health care workers who would be caring for COVID-19 patients (Aloui-Zarrouk, El Youssfi, Badu, Fagbamigbe, Matoke-Muhia, Ngugi, Dukhi & Mwaura, 2020).

The wearing of face masks as a mitigatory measure to curb the transmission of COVID-19 is controversial. The WHO does not encourage mandatory wearing of face masks. It encourages the use of face masks for curbing the spread of COVID-19 for infected individuals and health professionals caring for COVID-19 patients (Bukuluki & Kisaakye, 2021). While the European Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) argues that for effective prevention of transmission there was need for mandatory wearing of face masks across the world (Bukuluki & Kisaakye, 2021), some scholars however, argue that the WHO does not call for mandatory wearing of face masks because the world does not have enough resources to produce masks to cater for the critical frontline medical health personnel (Aloui-Zarrouk, et al. 2020). Incidentally, the WHO after conducting a workshop in 2020, concluded that even though there was no evidence that face masking reduces COVID-19 transmission, it recommended that in a severe influenza outbreak use of face masks in public should be considered (Cheng, Lam & Laung, 2020).

Upon realising that there were also some community transmissions of people who did not have compromised immune systems and had never travelled out of the country, the Government of Zimbabwe shifted its stance on mask wearing (Murewanhema, 2021). On 4 May 2020 through a statutory instrument, the government of Zimbabwe made the wearing of face masks mandatory in all public spaces (MoHCC, 2020). This was believed to limit the transmission of the coronavirus and anyone who violated this measure would be prosecuted (Crisis24, 2020). In order to implement this measure, the Government of Zimbabwe deployed security personnel across the country to ensure that the public complied with lock-

down measures, the wearing of face masks included. It is not only Zimbabwe which made the wearing of face masks mandatory but quite a number of low-income countries which found this as a very good mitigatory measure. This has been necessitated by the fact that these countries do not have the financial resources to treat their people in the event of a COVID-19 attack. Some of the countries that called for mandatory wearing of face masks in public places include Nigeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Ghana and Kenya among others (Aloi-Zarrok et al. 2020).

It has to be noted however, that for effective prevention of the spread of COVID-19, face masks have to be properly worn. They are supposed to be worn covering both the mouth and nose (MoHCC, 2020; Matuschek, Moll, Fangerau, Fischer, van Griensvein, Scheider, Kindgen-Milles, Knoeffel, Lichtenberg, Tamascoviks, Djiepmo-Njanang, Budach, Corradine, Haussinger, Feldt, Jensen, Pelker, Orth, ... Hausmann, 2020). If a mask gets damp from breathing it should be changed right away and any disposable mask should not be re-used. It is only the cloth masks that can be re-used after they are properly washed (MoHCC, 2020). Furthermore, when one is wearing a face mask, they are not supposed to touch the mask while using it. In addition, when disposing a mask, it should be put in a closed container to avoid transmission of pathogens to other people (MoHCC, 2020; Matuschek et al.). Despite the controversy surrounding the effectiveness of the use of face masks it is believed that if properly used and adhered to, these would greatly reduce transmission of the virus (Lubenga, Mendoza, Nkeremahame, Niyongabo, Gonza, Nakahwa & Musoke, 2022). Aloui-Zarrok et al. (2020: n.p) have also observed the importance of face masks when they state that, "Particularly in low- and middle-income countries, protecting by wearing of face masks is viewed as an affordable yet proactive preventative measure to avoid slow down viral spread based on experience from affected countries." Thus, Zimbabwe being a low-income country also found it prudent to just heed the call on the role of face masks in curbing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite hearing these claims on the positive effects of proper use of face masks, the general Zimbabwean populace still seems to be reluctant to properly wear face masks and seems to do so only to avoid prosecution and not for protecting themselves. The present study, therefore, endeavours to investigate the perceptions of the use of face masks by the Zimbabwean society and why they have not wholly accepted its use as a reliable COVID-19 mitigation strategy.

Statement of the Problem

The mitigatory strategies imposed by the Government of Zimbabwe in a bid to curb the spread of COVID-19 include vaccination, physical distancing, hand washing and hand sanitising as well as the wearing of face masks in public spaces. Even though the general Zimbabwean populace has been made aware that these mitigatory strategies prevent the spiral effects of COVID-19, Zimbabweans seem to have not wholly accepted the wearing of face masks as a preventative measure against COVID-19. Thus, most Zimbabweans tend to wear face masks as a ritual for fear of prosecution by the police or when the masks allow them to access certain benefits but not as a COVID-19 mitigation strategy. The chapter also further interrogates why even among those who police the wearing of face masks seem to be at liberty to remove their masks as and when they choose. In the midst of a pandemic, the question which remains is -who is fooling who? The chapter thus endeavours to investigate why Zimbabweans in general appear to have rejected the wearing of face masks despite its benefits. It further highlights some strategies that can help make people accept the wearing of face masks as a COVID-19 mitigatory measure.

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by the *Ubuntu* theoretical framework which is premised on “humanity through recognising the humanity of others” (Samkange & Samkange, 1980) and creating a communal atmosphere that emphasises “kinship among and between the indigenous people of Africa” (Ramose, 1991:271). Among the ethnic groups of Zimbabwe being human means having “*hUnhu/Ubuntu* and culture which implies being properly socialised into the cultural dictates of one’s ethnic group” (Furusa, 2006:20). Gelfand (1973:104) avers that *hunhu* refers to “an appreciation of values that are more than the material or useful” to personhood. Okyere-Manu and Morgan (2022:22) also aver that *Ubuntu* “embodies the very identity of the African people and informs what they do, how they live, and their relationship with each other and others.” It is imperative to ground the study in Afro-centred theoretical underpinnings that emanate from African culture and history because they demonstrate how mitigatory strategies to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic should not disregard *Ubuntu/Unhu* which undergirds African people’s lives in general. Furthermore, *Ubuntu* is pertinent to this study which hopes to proffer a way for-

ward in which the wearing of face masks as a COVID-19 mitigatory strategy can be accepted among Zimbabweans. The African philosophy of *Ubuntu* which “connotes humanness, a pervasive spirit of caring, and community harmony and hospitality, respect and responsiveness, that individuals and groups display for one another” is very relevant to this study (Mangaliso, 2001). Even though the theoretical framework of *Ubuntu* has its own weaknesses exhibited by xenophobic tendencies among Africans (Manyonganise, forthcoming) the theory can still be found useful by encouraging the wearing of face masks as protection of the individual and humanity at large. Also, if the concept of fairness is embedded in *Ubuntu* through proverbs such as *gudo guru peta muswe kuti vaduku vakutye* (an elderly or a person of high position should behave with dignity for him to earn respect from the younger ones/ subordinates) is embraced it would go a long way in promoting masking up and prevention of the spread of COVID-19. It is our contention that if *Ubuntu* is fully embraced, the African community can prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative methodology design which made it possible to investigate why Zimbabweans seem to have rejected the wearing of face masks as a COVID-19 mitigatory strategy. Purposive sampling method was used in identifying the research informants who would clarify on how Zimbabweans perceive the wearing of face masks in curbing the spread of COVID-19. This type of sampling method enabled the researchers to select participants that were regarded as data rich sources (Cresswell, 2014). The researchers did not worry about sample size because this was determined by data saturation. Data was collected through in-depth open-ended interviews with identified informants in Harare’s CBD and market places. The researchers chose Harare because it is a high risky area for COVID-19 cases and also had the highest COVID-19 cases (MoHCC, 2020). Furthermore, Harare also embodies urban dynamics such as an international airport, slums, traffic congestion, densely populated areas, trade centres and very busy vegetable markets which are fertile grounds for ease of transmission of the virus unlike in other urban centres of Zimbabwe. Ethical considerations were taken note of and interviewees were assured of anonymity, informed consent and freedom to pull out of the study whenever they felt like. Despite assurances of anonymity and privacy, one of the informants later confessed that they were not quite sure what the researchers wanted to do with the information and

did not want to be found on the wrong side of the law by discussing how the government strategies to curb the spread of the virus were not being taken seriously by the general populace. The chapter devised a coding system which represents the gender of the interviewee, for example F1 refers to the first female interviewee while M1 refers to the first male interviewee. The succeeding section indicates how Zimbabweans portray the use of face masking in preventing the spread of COVID-19.

Risky Behaviour: Mask Culture Projecting Personal Narratives

We observed that Zimbabweans engage in risky behaviour when using face masks. Most of the interviewees in Harare's Central Business District and Harare Markets stated that they did not believe that COVID-19 existed. They argued that it was a disease created by powerful nations as a way of controlling the weaker ones. One of the interviewees had this to say:

Why do I bother myself wearing a face mask to protect myself from a disease that does not exist? If it really existed, why is it that on the onset of the Ukraine and Russian war, news on the devastating effects of COVID-19 subsided? If it was a real epidemic as the powerful nations would like us to believe, could they engage in a useless war when people are faced with a devastating pandemic such as COVID-19. Why do you allow people to make fools out of you?" (M1, 2022).

This demonstrates that some Zimbabweans do not even believe that COVID-19 exists and, therefore, did not see the need to wear a face mask as a mitigatory strategy against the epidemic. The interviewee argued that the world would not engage in a useless war as the Russian-Ukrainian conflict if there was a real threat that posed danger to people's lives. Such understanding would make it very difficult for Zimbabweans to consistently and properly wear face masks. He further stated that Zimbabweans were wearing masks for fear of prosecution and heavy fines since they perceive that the pandemic does not exist. This explains why people still wanted to go ahead with body viewing of their deceased relatives as well as being found in overcrowded areas because they doubted the existence of COVID-19. Instead, they believed that COVID-19 was a Western ploy created to serve other purposes.

Some of the interviewees also concurred with the above that COVID-19 was non-existent, instead the government of Zimbabwe wanted to be seen to be trendy by following what developed countries were doing. They even argued that the Government institutes lockdown, vaccinations and the wearing of face masks to be seen to be in good standing with the super powers that gave Zimbabwe some COVID-19 funds. Furthermore, they argued that COVID-19 was big business to politicians and their associates who would get tenders to supply COVID-19 material as well as receiving COVID-19 donor funds from abroad. In an interview with a vegetable vendor at Mbare market, she stated that:

COVID-19 is a great opportunity to make money for those who are able to get tenders to supply COVID-19 material. As you can see this vegetable market is overcrowded and we come here everyday to sell our vegetables. We are overcrowded here and sometimes the police come to chase us from here. We run away and come back once they go away. We have to survive and not worry about wearing face masks instead of fending for our families. If COVID really existed we would have all died but we still come here every day and do our business as usual and we only pull up the face mask that will be dangling around our necks once we see a law enforcement agent (F1, 2022).

The interviewee also raised a very important aspect of COVID-19 being very big business, as an opportunity to make money. This is demonstrated in the case of a former health minister in Zimbabwe who was “charged with criminal abuse of office over the alleged awarding of a USD60 million contract for COVID-19 supplies” (Chingono, 2020) which was awarded corruptly. The lack of *ubuntu* where those in authority take advantage of the pandemic would make the ordinary people doubt the existence of COVID-19 and fail to take the wearing of face masks seriously.

Among some of interviewees who believed that COVID-19 existed, they still, however, did not believe that it would attack people of black descent. This group of people believed that the virus would only attack people who have suppressed immune systems as well as those who are exposed to international travel. One interviewee stated that she was jeered by colleagues at the market when she was found wearing a face mask. Some vegetable vendors said to her “Here at Mbare Musika there is no COVID. Why are you bothering yourself wearing *chi*-COVID (informal term for face mask)? This disease is for cold countries and also attacks those with suppressed immune systems” (F2, 2022). This demonstrates that some Zimbabweans believe that COVID-19 is foreign and will not

affect those who remain in the country and are not exposed to foreign travel or have contact with people from other countries. To such people the disease is foreign and should thus remain as such. Sipeyiye (2022) has also observed the mocking of people wearing face masks in Chipinge. Thus, the mocking of people who try to take heed and wear face masks is prevalent in Zimbabwe. After being mocked, such people normally remove their face masks because they also do not properly understand how face masking works in preventing an unknown disease. The jeering of those with face masks according to Sipeyiye (2002:48) “negatively impacts the uptake of preventative measures...since those jeered are subjected to humiliating experiences.” If Zimbabweans could respect one another in the spirit of *ubuntu* this would greatly increase the uptake of masking up.

Chi-COVID that has been made reference to by interviewee F2 is a Shona name given to a face mask. Face masks in Zimbabwe are now synonymous with COVID-19. “*Chi-*” is a secondary prefix found in class 7 of the Shona language and is used in either praising or derogating the noun which will be affixed to it. In this instance, the prefix “*chi-*” is used in derogatory terms for Zimbabweans look down upon the COVID-19 pandemic and even the mitigatory strategies being used. They have not really accepted the use of face masks as a mitigatory strategy and hence they use a derogatory term which carries overtones of criticism, sarcasm and caricature to denounce the face mask. That way most people do not feel comfortable to wear a face mask but would shun it. If the mitigatory measures are taken in the spirit of *ubuntu* where people respect measures put in place by those in authority this would go a long way in curbing the spread of the virus.

Masking up as a fashion statement

Some interviewees viewed masking up was a fashion statement and they tried to put on masks that match with whatever they are wearing. If there is nothing that matches with their clothes then they would either not wear the mask or recycle a mask that matches whatever they are wearing. One interviewee stated that she preferred a black surgical disposable mask because it goes with so many clothes. Another elderly lady stated that she would want a mask that matches her women’s guild church uniform and if she does not have the one which matches her uniform, she would rather not wear one because it goes against her uniform (F3, 2022). Most primary school children observed were wearing floral masks and this brightened

their day and make them happy. Thus, the reason they were wearing face masks are not for the prevention of the spread of COVID-19 but just a fashion statement. Schools in Zimbabwe have also produced masks with school logos and even employers have also produced some with their company's logos. One interviewee stated that he had one cloth mask with a company logo and when coming to work he would wear that one as a way of marketing his company in the crowded ZUPCO buses. Asking him whether he was wearing that cloth mask for preventing the spread of COVID-19, he stated that he personally did not believe it existed and that is why he was recycling his cloth mask which helped him to be fashionable just like other passengers on public transport who were putting on masks with company logos (M2, 2022). He also did not bother washing the cloth mask during the week and only did that over the weekends. Accordingly, people in general failed to be guided by the *ubuntu* philosophy which would make them want to protect the next person. They tend to be selfish and wear masks for their own selfish reasons.

Rebellion against the authorities/ Non-compliance as a political statement

The findings also revealed that some people did not wear face masks as a political statement against those in authority. Since mandatory wearing of face masks was a government directive, those who belong to the opposition party felt that if they complied, they would be agreeing with the government. For them, failure to wear a face mask was making a statement against those in authority. One opposition party member had this to say in an interview:

These lockdowns as well as physical distancing and wearing of face masks are the ruling party, ZANU (PF)'s (Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front) ploy to prevent the opposition party from campaigning for the by-elections to be held in March. Just like the face masks do you think it prevents transmission of the virus if it is really there? No. But these are part of stringent measures put by the ruling party to clip the wings of our party. Two female parliamentarians from our party were jailed for breaking lockdown measures, but look at what they do themselves? They continue to meet their supporters hold rallies, and address their supporters without wearing face masks. So why do they expect us to follow lockdown measures when they themselves who have put the measures are busy breaking them everyday?" (M3, 2022).

This amply demonstrates that some people are failing to wear face masks because they believe that it is a way which the government is using to control its people and prevent opposition party members from freely doing their business. This is not typical to Zimbabwe alone, even in some other countries. In the United States of America there were some “anti-mask rallies that were joined by people espousing conspiracy theories, such as the unfounded belief that the threat of COVID-19 has been exaggerated by the government in order to control the populace” (Taylor & Asmundson, 2021: n.p). Hence, some opposition party members believe that the wearing of face masks has been imposed upon the populace against their will and they tend to defy the government and those in authority. They tend to defy those in authority since there is no fairness in implementation of COVID-19 restrictions. Those who put down legislation are busy flouting the COVID-19 restrictions such that the opposition party members feel that the laws are only made to clip the wings of their party. It would be prudent if those in authority are also seen respecting the COVID-19 restrictions so that those in the opposition party could see the importance of the measures. Respecting of COVID-19 restrictions by those in authority would resonate very well with the Shona proverb which states that “*Gudo guru peta muswe kuti vaduku vakutyē*” (an elderly or a person of high position should behave with dignity for him to earn respect from the younger ones/subordinates). Failure to lead by example is rebellious to *Ubuntu* philosophy which encourages those in authority to lead by example and earn respect from the people they lead since *Ubuntu* does not encourage blind loyalty.

Health factors and masking up

Some of our findings indicated that some of the people do not wear face masks because of some health challenges. Those with asthma stated that masks make it very difficult for them to breathe and that is why they do not properly wear face masks. One interviewee stated that she was asthmatic and always leaves her mask dangling around her neck and once she sees law enforcement agents, she tries to pull up her mask to cover her mouth but rarely does it cover her nose (F4, 2022). Another interviewee stated that she wears spectacles and masking up normally results in her eye glasses clouding up especially in the mornings. She would rather wear her mask covering only the mouth (F5, 2022). The researchers have also observed people who wear corrective lenses in the public transport improperly wear their mask covering only the mouth due to the challenges

brought about by the wearing of face masks when one wears spectacles. Other interviewees stated that they do not wear face masks because they are allergic to them, once they wear them, they develop some rash around their faces, they have very sensitive skin (M4, 2022). Another interviewee said she did not like the painful cuts behind the ears she sometimes gets when wearing a mask, a size too small to cover her head, hence, she resorts to removing it (F6, 2022). Thus, one-size-fits all approaches in trying to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic do not always work. This leaves out quite a number of people exposed to the virus since they cannot mask up due to health reasons.

Religious beliefs and masking up

Religious beliefs also affected masking up in Zimbabwe. Some people are not masking up due to their religious beliefs. Those who belong to African Independent Churches (AICs) believe that the coronavirus was prayed for by their religious leaders and they were given holy water to ward off the devastating effects of the pandemic. One interviewee had this to say; “When I went to the prophetess to be prayed for wearing my face mask, I was told that we do not have COVID-19 here. Please remove your mask if you want me to pray for you. We had beginning of the year prayer sessions in which we prayed for the eradication of pandemics” (F7, 2022). The interviewee said that she had to comply and had to remove her face mask because she wanted the religious leader to pray for her. Similarly, Sibanda, Muyambo & Chitando (2022:10) have noted that the “Johanne Marange African Apostolic Church (JMAAC) flouted lockdown rules by holding their annual pascal meeting for 21 days in July 2021 without wearing face masks.” Furthermore, other religious groupings like those in African Traditional Religion(s) also attributed sickness to evil spirits. In an interview, an elderly lady had this to say, “One can only get COVID-19 or any other sickness if the ancestors are angry with that person and have forsaken their descendants. If the ancestors are happy one is protected, no disease or ill thing can befall a person” (F8, 2022). This demonstrates that various religious persuasions also influenced people in the wearing of face masks. Those from AICs and ATR(s) believed that they were protected by the supernatural being. However, the conventional churches encourage face masking. However, within those churches there are still people who do not believe in the wearing of face masks to prevent the transmission of COVID-19. One interviewee from the United Methodist Church had this to say “I go and worship at the main circuit which is 5km

away because in that circuit, there is no nurse who enforces the wearing of face masks” (M5, 2022). This amply demonstrates that most people do not believe in COVID-19 and the wearing of face masks to prevent its transmission. If only they could take heed of those in authority as well as being considerate of others as enshrined in *Ubuntu* this could go a long way in curbing the spread of the virus.

Socio-economic factors and the non-compliance of face masks

Some of the findings also indicated that Zimbabweans are affected by socio-economic factors which result in them sharing and recycling masks. One interviewee stated that she and her family can use the same mask as long as they go out in public at different times. She stated that they have a place in their kitchen where they keep the face mask in use, if a child is sent to the shops, she can use the mask and when she gets back the mother can use it to go to church and when she returns, the father can also use the same mask without washing it and goes to meet his friends at a beer garden. The interviewee stated that she did this in her household for both cloth masks and disposable masks (F9, 2022). Another interviewee who works in government whom one would think is educated and would have a better understanding of COVID-19 also stated that she recycled disposable masks. She said:

I normally prefer wearing black masks which do not get dirty so easily. I detest the light blue or white surgical masks because I only wear them once and cannot re-use them. Instead, I prefer buying a box of black surgical masks. When I come back from work, I hang it on my dressing table for use the following day. I use one black disposable mask for the whole week and will only throw it in a bin after using it for at least five days. Also, if the mask gets damp, I remove it and dry it using a tissue and then put it back. These masks are an unnecessary expense for a disease which we are not even sure exists. So, I must pretend as if I am complying with the government’s directive (F9, 2022).

This clearly demonstrates the risky behaviour being practiced by Zimbabweans in the use of face masks. As people go about their business properly wearing a face mask by covering both the mouth and nose, they are using recycled masks, damp masks as well as touching their masks during use. Others are also washing surgical masks which should be disposed after a single use. The researchers have observed people moving around with masks dangling below their chin in public transport or even in shopping malls. These would quickly pull them up over their mouth

and nose at the sight of law enforcement agents. This was reiterated by one Harare resident who stated that, “It seems most people are wearing the masks for the wrong reason. They are doing it more out of fear of arrest than their own safety” (News24, 2020: n.p). Zimbabweans wear masks to evade heavy fines by the police and not their own safety (Makombe, 2021). Fearing the law enforcement agents defeats the whole purpose of wearing a face mask as a COVID-19 prevention strategy. Furthermore, in the event that they are caught by law enforcement agents without wearing a face mask, interviewees stated that they always pay a bribe to the police and get away with murder (M6, 2022). The fact that the police officers were accepting bribes and allowing those who flouted COVID-19 measures to go scot-free was also reiterated by the General Commissioner of police when he appeared before the Health and Child Care Parliamentary Portfolio Committee in June 2020 (Mutanda, 2022). Non-compliance to face masking is also prevalent in Uganda and they also had to use law enforcement agents to promote compliance (Lubenga, et al. 2022). Paradoxically, the law enforcement agents who are supposed to police people also violate the COVID-19 protocols by not wearing face masks and practicing social distancing (Maulani, Nyadera & Wandeka, 2021). If there are no security personnel in sight, or if they are bribed, then one can easily expose themselves and infect others. The people lack the spirit of oneness of fearing for another and hoping to protect one another from the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, *Ubuntu* encourages those in authority to lead by example.

Even though people are aware of how these disposable masks should be used, they do not follow the procedure because the masks are very expensive for them. This cost is considered a luxury for people who live below 1 USD per person per day. It is not only in Zimbabwe where face masks are expensive but in Nigeria and Ghana where the prices of face masks trebled with the onset of COVID-19 because foreign tourists hoarded them for use back home (Junior & Dei, 2020). Hence, socio-economic factors have also resulted in non-compliance in the use of face masks for COVID-19 prevention in Zimbabwe and some other African countries. In the spirit of *Ubuntu* those who could afford to buy face masks could also assist those who could not. The following section demonstrates some of the measures that can be used to enlighten people on the use of face masks as a mitigatory strategy against COVID-19.

Mitigatory strategies that can be used to promote masking-up in the face of COVID-19 in Zimbabwe

The findings have clearly demonstrated that the general populace in Zimbabwe has not wholly accepted mandatory face masking promulgated by the Government of Zimbabwe as a mitigatory strategy in preventing the spread of COVID-19. There is need for a number of strategies that can be used to increase the uptake and adherence of face masking in preventing the spread of COVID-19 in Zimbabwe in particular and other countries in general.

The first possible strategy would be to rope in traditional leaders such as chiefs to be part of the intervention strategy. Even though chiefs are being empowered to raise awareness on COVID-19 protocols at gatherings they, however, have limited powers and cannot enforce masking-up as security forces do. Instead, community and traditional leaders should be empowered to enforce COVID-19 protocols. Hashmi, Iqbal, Haque and Saleem (2020:19) have also noted the importance of empowering community leaders in warding off epidemics and argue that it is important to always take traditional leaders on board. These are respected by their communities and if involved in raising awareness they are going to be in a better position to be listened to by the community as compared to top-down approaches that come from very high offices. The successful use of traditional leaders in combating epidemics has also been observed by Miller and Rubin (2011) in the context of HIV and AIDS. Sibanda et al. (2022) have also noted the importance of involving traditional leaders and medical health personnel to educate communities on deadly pandemics such as COVID-19.

There is also need to adopt a Training-of-Trainers model in training community leaders who live with people in the community about the importance of correct use of and adherence to face masks curbing the spread of COVID-19. The community should be made aware that that face masks are not worn for fear of prosecution but for one's own safety. The correct use and disposal should be highlighted otherwise people will continue to fool themselves by merely adorning these masks for the wrong reasons, fearing prosecution. The Training-of-Trainer model ensures sustainability because of its potential for up-skilling the workforce rapidly and economically (Momina & Pinder, 2018; Gudhlanga & Madongonda, 2021). The community members who would have been trained would in-turn

train other members on the correct use and adherence to face masks as well as understanding the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, there is also need to sensitise service providers on the benefits of using a face mask to curb the spread of COVID-19 (Mugambe, Ssekamalte, Kisaka, Wafula, Isunju, Naligia, Optain, Makanga, Mukiibi, Buregyeye, Kasasa, Kansiiime, Balen, Kapoor & McGriff, 2021). There is need for sensitisation programmes in general in schools, churches and communities at large to improve people's "perceptions towards COVID-19 and face masks, and consequently increase correct face mask usage in the community" (Mwesige, Nalugya, Bulefu, Tigaiza, Nagawa, Balinda & Walekwa, 2021: n.p). Adequate public health education on correct use of masks removes the potential problems that might be encountered if one uses a mask without adequate knowledge (Lang, Cheng, Lam and Migliori, 2020). Once these initiatives on public health awareness are done, as well as the promotion of *Ubuntu* and the need to protect the another, this would go a long way in promoting the uptake and adherence of face masking to curb the spread of COVID-19 in Zimbabwe.

The other mitigatory strategy would be the use of indigenous languages to broadcast messages of pandemics. Most of the public health messages on COVID-19 and its devastating effects as well as the mitigatory measures are being broadcast in English. This leaves out a large sector of the population that speaks indigenous languages. People generally do not take seriously the messages broadcast in a foreign language (Gudhlanga, 2005; Gudhlanga & Makaudze, 2007). In very few instances where translation into indigenous languages is done, we find that the translated text will be an abridged version which leaves out vital information. For the general public to take the public health messages on COVID-19 and the use of face masks seriously, it would be good for such messages to be broadcast in indigenous languages that are spoken by a greater part of the population. Over and above broadcasting public health messages, there is need to hold workshops in communities teaching about COVID-19 and its mitigatory strategies. Sibanda et al. (2022:16) have also noted "the importance of the use of an accessible language and media and the need to use both traditional and western epistemics concomitantly in the face of pandemics as deadly as COVID-19."

In cases where religion flouts government regulations in its messaging about pandemics it is important to try and understand why the government is putting on those restrictions. There is need for roping in religious leaders so that they can comprehend the issues at play. In cases

where the government flouts its own rules it should be guided by *Ubuntu* where one should lead by example. Once those in authority spearhead the implementation of the preventative measures, they would set a very good example to the general populace.

Since some sectors of the population cited financial constraints there is also need to distribute free masks for all. These could be placed in public spaces for easy access as what happens with condoms in Zimbabwe that are placed in public toilets. Uganda gives at least a face mask to children aged six and above as a way of making them easily accessible to the general populace (Mwesige et al. 2021). Apart from distributing free masks, affordable ones could be produced as well. Ghana made an effort to mass produce affordable face masks for use by the general public (Junior et al. 2020). This could also be adopted in Zimbabwe to increase the uptake of face masking among those who cited financial constraints in acquiring some. It is hoped that if the given recommendations are taken on board, they would go a long way in promoting the uptake and adherence of face masking as a COVID-19 preventative measure in Zimbabwe.

Conclusion

The Chapter has discussed how face masking is being used as a mitigatory strategy to curb the transmission of COVID-19. It has brought to the fore various factors that have made it impossible for Zimbabweans to wholly accept face masking as a preventative measure against COVID-19. It has also highlighted the fact that Zimbabweans generally do not wear face masks to protect themselves against COVID-19 but for fear of prosecution by law enforcement agents. Thus, the chapter has brought to the fore how even those who seem to be wearing face masks in public are fooling those in authority for they are not following the proper way of wearing face masks. Even those in authority also seem to violate the face mask directive thereby only fooling themselves as they are the ones at risk. The chapter has also highlighted the various strategies that can be used to educate the general populace on the deadly effects of the pandemic and the correct use of face masks as a mitigatory measure that can be used together with other biomedical measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. It has also demonstrated that in order for the war against COVID-19 to be contained there is need to engage even traditional community leaders, as well as broadcasting COVID-19 messages in indigenous languages so that people can understand the invisible enemy that they are fighting with and stop

taking it as a foreign pandemic. If *Ubuntu/Unhu* is used in the fight against COVID-19 it would go a long way in sensitising the general populace about COVID-19 and making them responsible citizens who can watch out for each other and make it their duty to protect each other against the deadly effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter has finally concluded that the wearing of a face mask is not a luxury of health personnel but a more affordable strategy that can be used by low-income countries in mitigating the transmission of COVID-19.

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