



REVIEW ARTICLE

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## A Critical Survey of the Meaning of National Health to Nigeria's College Students

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to find out the level of understanding of the concept of health to the Nigerian youth. The participants of this study were college students drawn from randomly selected communities in Cross River, Edo, and Kaduna States in Nigeria. A total of 140 participants were enlisted in the current study. Data were obtained with the aid of structured pretested questionnaires. The questionnaire was divided into sections and elicited information on the participants' understanding of health, what it means to have a healthy Nigeria, and their role in making a healthy Nigeria. Defining what health meant to them, the majority of participants (50%) defined health as *"a state of being mentally and physically balanced. A period of balance where there is no displacement in any functioning of the body"*.

The majority of the respondents (n=112, 80%) indicated that Nigeria is not healthy while 20% (n=28) indicated otherwise. Ascertaining if participants have a role in the health of Nigeria, the result indicated that the majority of the respondents (90%, n= 126) were of the opinion that they have a role to play in improving the health of Nigeria. Participants in the current study appear to be ready for a shift in the nature and systems of development around them, according to the findings. They had a clear understanding of what health was and what it meant to be in a healthy state and based on their response to the country's current state of health, it is clear that they require change, which is reflected in their belief that they have a role to play in the country's health and development.

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### Introduction

For a long time, researchers have looked into the link between socioeconomic status and health. These studies have found that populations with lower socioeconomic status are less healthy than their counterparts with higher socioeconomic status. Academics believed that medical technology and economic development would reduce health inequality, at least in developed countries, a few decades ago [1]. Studies in the United States and Europe have also confirmed this conclusion, namely that the health of those with higher socioeconomic status is clearly superior to those with lower socioeconomic status [2].

For promoting and maintaining health, preventing and managing disease, reducing unnecessary disability and premature death, and achieving health equity for all, all people need access to comprehensive, high-quality health care services [3]. A well-functioning health system ensures not only adequate and timely medical care, but also a viable economy and, as a result, a secure future for all citizens.

Nigeria is a vast country with a population of over 200 million people and 83 million people living below the poverty line of 137,430 Naira (\$381.75) per year. This equates to a little more

than 40% of the total population [4]. Citizens must begin to see a link between their leadership, socioeconomic status, and overall health, and demand leadership that promotes development. This research will attempt to shed light on what health facilities and services are available, as well as how they can be accessed. It will also show how our political choices for a leader can either sabotage or improve our healthcare system and, in particular, our health.

The goal of this study was to educate young people, particularly secondary school students in Nigeria about the importance of leadership in their personal health. Why is it that the population is so young? According to United Nations population projections for 2020, about 43 percent of Nigeria's population is under the age of 14, 19 percent is 15-24 years old, and 62 percent is under the age of 25. In contrast, only about 5% of the population is over the age of 60. Nigeria has a young population, with a median age of around 18 years [5].

A large portion of the population is made up of children and adolescents. We believe that by demanding accountability from those in power, young people can ensure a more thriving and healthier nation. This is linked to SPPG goals (2) and (3), which are Political Economy and Democracy Engagement, and

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Economic and Sector Policies for Inclusive Growth and Shared Prosperity, respectively [6].

## Materials and Methods

### Study Area

The study area covered selected urban and rural communities in Cross River, Edo and Kaduna States. The states were selected purposefully because Edo and Cross River state represented South-South region of Nigeria while Kaduna represented the North Western region.

### Sampling

The current study is a cross sectional study. Sampling was done using simple random sampling; while the States were selected purposively, the communities in the state were selected using simple random sampling.

### Data collection

Data collection was done with a pre-tested, structured, interviewer-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into sections and elicited information on the participants understanding of health, what it means to have a healthy Nigeria, and their role in making a healthy Nigeria. Data was collected in the Fall of 2021 (September) and analysed in December 2021.

### Data analysis

Data were analysed with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (version 23). Frequency distribution of variables and cross-tabulation of variables were recorded. A Chi-square test was done to test for association between variables and the level of significance was set at 5% at a 95% Confidence Interval.

## Result and Discussion

### What does health mean to you today?

The respondents gave different definitions of what health means to them (Table 1); the definitions were grouped according to their similarities. Half of the respondents (50%) defined health as *“a state of being mentally and physically balanced. A period of balance where there is no displacement in any functioning of the body”*. This definition is similar to the definition of Felman [7] who defined health as *“a state of complete emotional and physical well-being”*.

The definition of Shilton *et al.* [8] lends credence to the definition of 16% of the respondents which suggests that health has a lot to do with living in a good environment. Thus, their definition *“Health can be defined as the act of living in a good environment”*. Shilton *et al.* [8] assert that ‘health is created when individuals, families, and communities are afforded the income, education, and power to control their lives, and their needs and rights are supported by systems, environments and policies that are enabling and conducive to better health.’

The translation of hygiene to health and the attribution of health to cleanliness was seen in the definition of 2.1% of the respondents. They stated that *“Health is a state of keeping*

*your body and environment clean”*. This definition of health is in congruence with Last [9] definition. Last [9] defined health as ‘a sustainable state of equilibrium or harmony between humans and their physical, biological and social environments that enables them to coexist indefinitely. This definition has an ecological perspective whereby health is dependent on its sustainability and its interrelation with the surrounding environment.

Some respondents (10.0%) defined health as wealth; their exact definition brings clarity to the testament of wealth in wellness. They defined health as *“Health is wealth, health mean everything to me because once I have health, I have wealth”* 8.6% defined health as *“being full as well as a state of being well”*. Translating their definition literally, it explains the saying *“a full belly is a good body”*. Their definition linked the states of being fully fed and being physically fit or well. This definition is similar to the definition of Card [10] who defined health as *“the experience of physical and psychological well-being. Good health and poor health do not occur as a dichotomy but as a continuum. The absence of disease or disability is neither sufficient nor necessary to produce a state of good health.”*

The attribution of health and wellness to financial stability and the ability to live life to the full is not uncommon. The reflection of the correlation of health to financial stability is evident in the definition of 10% of the respondents in the current study *“Health means the way you are enjoying your life, you have your money, you live a happy life, eat good food”*.

It is common to relate health to a physical state; this is similar to believing health is either wellness or a state of absence of illness thereof. What is therefore fascinating about the definition of health of 1.4% of the respondents in the current study is their attribution of health to either a state of wellness, that is the absence of illness or the presence of it. They defined health as *“simply the physical state or condition of any person either good or bad”*.

All the definitions of health by the respondents in the current study are in congruence with the three definitions of health reported in literature as drawn from the original definition of the constitution of the World Health Organisation on April 1948 which defined health *“as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being”* [11].

The first of the three definitions states that *“health is the absence of any disease or impairment.”* The second is that *“health is a state that allows the individual to adequately cope with all demands of daily life”* thus implying also the absence of disease and impairment. The third definition states that *“health is a state of balance, an equilibrium that an individual has established within himself and between himself and his social and physical environment”* [12].

The third definition mentioned above makes health depend on whether a person has established a state of balance within oneself and with the environment. This means that those with a disease or impairment will be considered as being healthy to a level defined by their ability to establish an internal equilibrium

that makes them get the most they can from their life despite the presence of the disease [12].

The advantage of this definition is that diseases do not replace individuals' health: they may affect their balance more or less severely but, at all times, the patients who suffer from a disease (and their doctors) remain aware of the need to work simultaneously on two tasks – one, to remove or alleviate the disease and the second to establish a state of balance, as best they can, within oneself and in relation with their environment [12].

**Table 1:** What does health mean to you today?

Question	Response [n (%)]	Pearson's value (Sig.)
<b>What does health mean to you today?</b>		
Health is wealth, health means everything to me because once I have health, I have wealth	14 (10.0)	140.000 (0.322)
A state of keeping of your body and state clean	3 (2.1)	
The physical state or condition of any person either good or bad	2 (1.4)	
Being fully well, also is a state of being well	12 (8.6)	
The state of being mentally and physically balanced. A period of balance where there is no displacement in any functioning of the body	70 (50.0)	
The act of living in good environment	23 (16.4)	
The way you are enjoying your life, you have your money, you live a happy life, eat good food.	11 (7.9)	
A state of being physically, financially and mentally stable	5 (3.6)	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>140 (100.0)</b>	

### Nigeria's Health

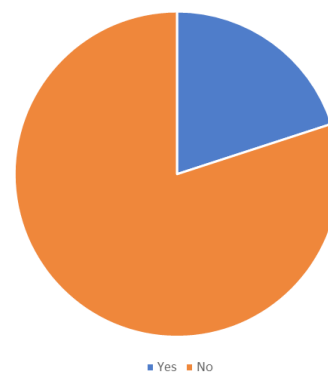
The definition of health as indicated by the respondents in the current study is reflected in the individual choice of the respondents when asked if Nigeria is healthy (Table 2). The majority of the respondents (80%) indicated that Nigeria is not healthy while 20% indicated otherwise.

Of those that indicated that Nigeria is not healthy (80%), 24.1% opined that it is as a result of bad leadership, lack of basic amenities (25.9%) was the chief reason for respondents, otherds pointed towards corruption, sickness and diseases, economic hardship, unsanitary conditions, insecurity, citizenry, unemployment, the trio of bad leadership, corruption, and insecurity (Table 2). These factors were listed as determinants of poverty by Omoniyi [13] who relating development deficit with poverty outlined the declining level of economic growth, income inequalities, unemployment, corruption, bad governance as determinants of poverty in Nigeria. The result is also in tandem with the factors reported by Khalid [14]. The factors outlined have been reported as major contributors to poverty in a nation.

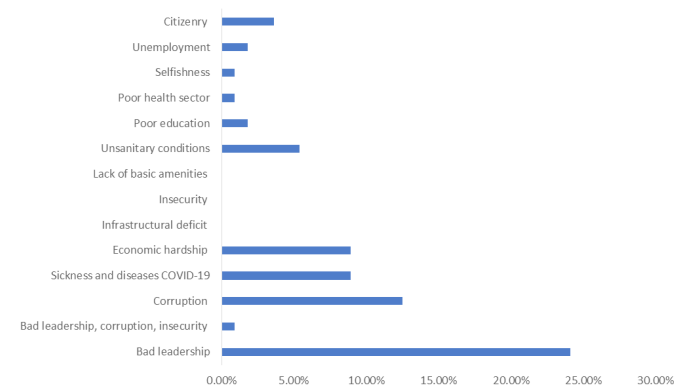
Of the respondents that indicated that the country is indeed healthy (20%), 32.1% were of the opinion that Nigeria has the prospects to be healthy and is in the right course of development and growth. The presence of good roads and water (7.1%), good people and good food (7.1%), the God

factor (7.1%), availability of basic amenities (7.1%), observing COVID-19 protocols (3.6%), proper education (3.6%), good doctors (3.6%) were among the reasons stated as being responsible for the nation being healthy.

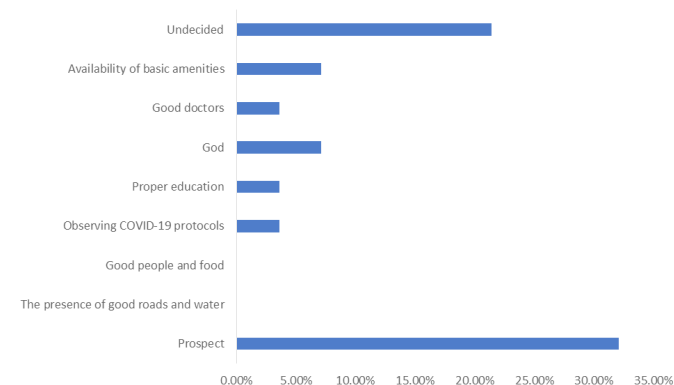
A shift from the reported socio-political instability, high degree of corruption, mass hostility to the "public," and poor macroeconomic management [15] will be highly beneficial and instrumental to the development of Nigeria. This lends credence to the perception of respondents in the current study. Respondents suggest good governance (40%), basic amenities (23.6%), hospitals (15.7%), clean environment (5.0%), citizenship responsibility (4.3%), employment opportunities (2.1%), free education (1.4%), good teachers (1.4%), will be instrumental in improving the health of our dear nation.



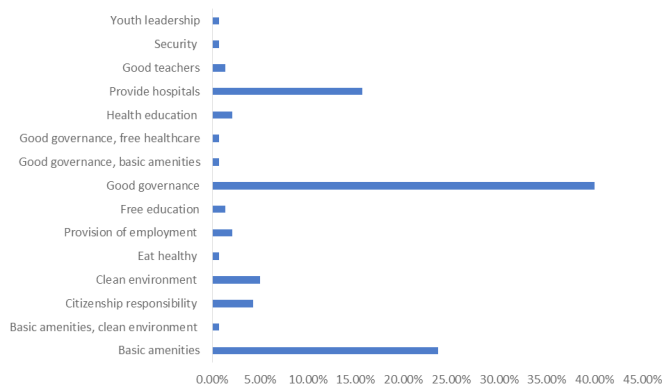
**Figure 1:** Is Nigeria Healthy?



**Figure 2:** If no, what informed your opinion?



**Figure 3:** If Yes, what is your reason?



**Figure 4:** What can you suggest to improve the health of our dear nation?

**Table 2:** Nigeria's Health.

Questions	Response [n (%)]	Pearson's value (Sig.)
<b>Is Nigeria Healthy?</b>		
Yes	28 (20.0)	91.603 (0.020)
No	112 (80.0)	
<b>If No, what informed your opinion?</b>		
Bad leadership	27 (24.1)	25.039 (0.969)
Bad leadership, corruption, insecurity	1 (0.89)	
Corruption	14 (12.5)	
Sickness and diseases COVID-19	10 (8.9)	
Economic hardship	10 (8.9)	
Infrastructural deficit	1 (0.89)	
Insecurity	4 (3.6)	
Lack of basic amenities	29 (25.9)	
Unsanitary conditions	6 (5.4)	
Poor education	2 (1.8)	
Poor health sector	1 (0.89)	
Selfishness	1 (0.89)	
Unemployment	2 (1.8)	
Citizenry	4 (3.6)	
<b>If Yes, what is your reason?</b>		
Prospect	9 (32.1)	
The presence of good roads and water	2 (7.1)	
Good people and food	2 (7.1)	
Observing COVID-19 protocols	1 (3.6)	
Proper education	1 (3.6)	
God	2 (7.1)	
Good doctors	1 (3.6)	
Availability of basic amenities	2 (7.1)	
<i>Undecided</i>	6 (21.4)	
<b>What can you suggest to improve the health of our dear nation?</b>		
Basic amenities	33 (23.6)	7.157 (0.996)
Basic amenities, clean environment	1 (0.7)	
Citizenship responsibility	6 (4.3)	
Clean environment	7 (5.0)	
Eat healthy	1 (0.7)	
Provision of employment	3 (2.1)	
Free education	2 (1.4)	
Good governance	56 (40.0)	
Good governance, basic amenities	1 (0.7)	
Good governance, free healthcare	1 (0.7)	
Health education	3 (2.1)	
Provide hospitals	22 (15.7)	
Good teachers	2 (1.4)	
Security	1 (0.7)	
Youth leadership	1 (0.7)	

## Your role in improving Nigeria's health

There are different schools of thought on the involvement and roles of citizens and leaders in nation-building. The result of this study shows that the majority of the respondents (90%) were of the opinion that they have a role to play in improving the health of Nigeria. 8.6% indicated that they have no role to play while 1.4% were undecided. The high number of participants indicating they have a role to play in Nigeria's development is an indication of a shift in mentality, a positive outlook to a change of mindset. This is because the result of this study is a huge shift from the outcome of a 2018 survey conducted by the pew research center. Their study concluded that only 39% of Nigerians are satisfied with the way democracy is working in their country, while 60% say they are not satisfied [16]. A situation of non-satisfaction has been plagued by the shifting of blame to who is really responsible. This was minutely observed in the current study as of those that said they have no role in the nation's health, 75% indicated that the government is solely responsible for the nation's health while 25% believed that others except them should be responsible.

Of those that that indicated they have a role to play, majority (21.2%, n= 42%) cited citizen responsibility bordering on change ambassador (4.8%), upright followership (0.8%), frequent health checks (0.8%), respect to parents (0.8%), shunning violence (0.8%), vote right (1.6%), stakeholder mindset (13.5%), and obedience to authority (10.3%). This result reflects the mindset of Scharmer and Kaufer [17] when they stated that for change to occur, every citizen must be a stakeholder in the affairs of the nation.

There are certain roles that are obligatory for the government. The fact that respondents in the current study indicated that they will provide basic amenities (6.3%, n=8), education (13.5%, n=17), good governance (7.9%, n=10), health education (11.9%, n=15), and hospitals (2.4%, n=3), as their role in improving the health of the nation reflects the current state where citizens provide certain amenities for themselves. This is in tandem with the report attributed to Akinwunwi Adesina, the president of the African Development Bank (AFDB). He stated thus, "Governments, over time, have simply transferred their responsibility to citizens. When governments or institutions fail to provide basic services, the people bear the burden — a heavy implicit tax on the population" [18].

**Table 3:** Your role in improving Nigeria's health.

Questions	Response [n (%)]	Pearson's value (Sig.)
<b>Do you think you have a role to play in improving the health of Nigeria?</b>		
Yes	126 (90.0)	17.290 (0.008)
No	12 (8.6)	
Undecided	2 (1.4)	
<b>If No, whose role is it then?</b>		
Government	9 (75.0)	3 (25.0)
Others except me	3 (25.0)	
<b>If Yes, what role do you think you can play to improve the health of Nigeria?</b>		
Basic amenities	8 (6.3)	57.798 (0.053)
Citizenship responsibility:	42 (21.2)	
Change ambassador	6 (4.8)	



<i>Followership</i>	1 (0.8)
<i>Health checks</i>	1 (0.8)
<i>Obedience to authority</i>	13 (10.3)
<i>Respect parents</i>	1 (0.8)
<i>Shun violence</i>	1 (0.8)
<i>Stakeholder</i>	17 (13.5)
<i>Vote right</i>	2 (1.6)
Clean environment	26 (20.6)
Eat healthy	1 (0.8)
Education	17 (13.5)
Provide employment	3 (2.4)
Good governance	10 (7.9)
Health education	15 (11.9)
Provide hospitals	3 (2.4)
Pray	1 (0.8)

## Conclusion

According to the findings, participants in the current study appear to be prepared for a shift in the nature and systems of development around them. They had a clear understanding of what health was and what it means to be in a healthy state. It is clear from their responses to the country's current state of health that they require change, which is reflected in their belief that they have a role to play in the country's health and development.

## Recommendations

- Continuous education is critical for the development of young Nigerians; therefore, policy studies in higher institutions and high schools are recommended.
- Citizens' participation in government is critical for achieving a complete sense of followership. This will ensure that citizens are aware of the government's progress as well as its shortcomings. As a result, it is recommended that the government run an all-inclusive government in order to provide reassurance to its people.

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