PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS CORONA VIRUS (COVID-19) INFECTION IN MAIDUGURI BORNO STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

Since discovering coronavirus infection in the Chinese city of Wuhan in December 2019, the novel virus has spread widely across the globe, affecting both developed and less developed countries. This current study assesses the public perception towards Covid-19 infection in Maiduguri, Borno State. A descriptive cross-sectional study design was used in this study. Data were collected randomly using a self-administered questionnaire using 200 respondents across Maiduguri. The study revealed that a significant number of individuals are aware of the infection but see it as a normal health condition. Based on the findings and the conclusion reached, this paper recommended, among others, to create awareness in the community and explain the dangers of coronavirus infection. This can be achieved by involving the religious, community, and youth leaders and being transparent and accountable. It is also the government's responsibility through the NCDC and the Ministry of Health to carry people alone on matters that affect their health needs; this way, trusts will be created and hence compliance by the community members.

1. Introduction

The emergence of the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) has caused significant adjustments worldwide, with many countries yet to come to terms with the reality of the upheaval caused by the pandemic. The new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) is a highly infectious disease originating from Wuhan, China, to most parts of the world. The difficulty in detecting infected people because of the lack of symptoms and similarities with symptoms of common cold and flu have contributed to its rapid spreading worldwide (Chan et al., 2020). As a result, the infection has affected more than 200 countries worldwide (Bordi et al., 2020). As the number of deaths from the disease rises worldwide, it is becoming increasingly important to understand public risk perception (Van Bavel et al., 2020).

Different safety campaign measures were carried out across Nigeria. These measures include maintaining social distancing, using a facemask in public places, avoiding handshakes, and washing hands with soap and water or hand sanitizer (NCDC, 2020). However, perception shapes one's knowledge and the adoption of safety measures concerning the transmission of infection (Ilesanmi & Afolabi, 2020). It is also evidenced from previous pandemics that lack of proper knowledge about the disease is associated with the negative perception among people, which can further complicate the attempts to prevent the disease's spread (Person & Holton, 2004).

Therefore, the objections of this paper are to determine the perception of people in Maiduguri towards the spread of Corona Virus Infection (Covid-19) and to determine their knowledge of the pandemic, as well as the preventive measures used.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Design and Study Setting

A descriptive cross-sectional study design was used in this study. Data were collected randomly using a self-administered questionnaire. Data collection took place in June 2020 in Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria.

We received responses from 200 respondents across Maiduguri, which was used in this study. Respondents for this study participated voluntarily with complete anonymity

guaranteed, and they were accordingly informed. The questionnaire consisted of semi-structured interviewer-administered questions. The questionnaire collected information on sociodemographic characteristics, level of awareness of Corona Virus Infection (Covid-19), and how they perceive Corona Virus Infection (Covid-19. What effort do they make to protect themselves and others from contracting the infection? Also, their knowledge of the danger of the Infection (Covid-19). As well as any other advice or suggestion they want to make on this pandemic that is important to the community. The last question allowed subjects to provide a detailed written answer to obtain their view or perception of the pandemic.

2.2. Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used, SPSS version 20 was used to analyze the data.

2.3. Results

Table 1: Demographic characteristics (n = 200)

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Sex		
Male	118	59.0%
Female	82	41.0%
Total	200	100
Age		
18-25	76	38.0%
26-35	80	40.0%
36-45	29	14.5%
46 and above	15	7.5%
Total	200	100
Qualifications		
No formal education	29	14.5%
Primary/Secondary certificate	70	35.0%
Degree/Higher degree	101	50.5%
Total	200	100
Employment status		
Civil servant	79	39.5%
Self-employed	59	29.5%
Not employed	62	31.0%
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey 2020.

The demographic data revealed that 59% were male, and those within the age range of 26-35 presented the highest percentage of 40.0%. Also, 50.5% of the respondents held a higher degree, and 39.5% were civil servants.

Table 2: Perception of Covid-19 (n = 200)

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Awareness of Covid-19		
Yes	118	59.0%
No	82	41.0%
Total	200	100
Perception towards Covid-19		
Normal health condition	80	40.0%
Public health emergency	76	38.0%
Total	200	100
Danger of Covid-19		
Dangerous	29	14.5%
Not dangerous	70	35.0%
I do not know	101	50.5%
Total	200	100

***Source:** Field Survey 2020*

Table 2 revealed that a significant number of the respondents (59%) were aware of the coronavirus infection. In contrast, 40% see it as a normal health condition. However, most of the 50.5% do not know the danger of Covid-19.

Table 3: Preventive Measures used towards Covid-19 (n=200)

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Use of hand wash/Sanitizer		12.5%
Using	25	87.5%
Not using	175	
Total	200	100
Use of facemask		
Using	42	21.0%
Not using	158	79.0%
Total	200	100
Maintaining social distancing		
Maintaining	16	8.0%
Not maintaining	184	92.0%
Total	200	100
Not using any method of prevention		
Using	57	28.5%
Not using	143	71.5%
Total	200	100
Using all methods of prevention		
Using	66	33.0%
Not using	134	67.0%
Total	200	100

Source: *Field Survey 2020*

Table 3 shows the preventive measures used by the respondents. Where 87.5% of the respondents do not use hand sanitizer, 79.0% never used facemasks, while the majority of the respondents, 92.0%, do not maintain social distancing. A significant number of the 71.5%, do not use any method, only 33.0% used all the preventive measures.

As stated earlier, the last question allowed subjects to provide a detailed written answer to obtain their views or perceptions of the pandemic. Therefore, the following statements were the view stated on the pandemic by some individuals:

"There is the need for the government to take punitive measure against those who break the law and refuse to comply with the Covid-19 preventive measures".

"We learn to live with the virus since there is no cure".

"Covid-19 is a gimmick and therefore advises the community to do nothing.

"There is the need to employ a different method to tackle the Covid-19 not necessarily locking people".

About 13% of the respondents stated that "the government needs to create awareness using all possible channels to enlighten the community". While about 19% of the respondents stated that "it is important to use all the methods to prevent the spreading of the pandemic", and 10% of the respondents stated that "it is a necessity to follow government's directives on the pandemic".

The following are the statements provided by those who express their views in writing:

"Do not travel". "Avoid gathering, especially people who are not wearing a face mask, maintain regular medical check-ups, and report to the hospital when you observe any symptom of coronavirus".

"Massive awareness campaign on the complication of the disease by the government involves traditional and religious leaders on the prevention of Covid-19, provide medicine and equipment to fight the disease, enough personnel and provision of testing equipment and isolation centre for treatment of positive cases".

"Government should take strict measures". "Lockdown the community".

"Government to provide hand sanitizer to the community".

"Government to ease the lockdown and allow people to move freely".

"People should cooperate with the government to reduce the spread of this infection".

"The community to be prayerful and cooperate with NCDC officials on their guidelines in other to halt the pandemic".

"Report any person suspected".

3. Discussion

Since the discovery of coronavirus infection in the Chinese city of Wuhan in 2019, the pandemic has become one of the largest in the world, involving more than 200 countries (Worldometers, 2020). This current study assessed the public perception towards Covid-19 infection in Borno State. Our finding revealed that a significant number of individuals are

aware of the infection but see it as a normal health condition. From the present study, 59% of the respondents were male. This is because the society is patriarchal (male-dominated), and most of them were youth within the age range of 26-35. That is to say; they are at their productive age. Moreover, many of them were well educated; 50.5% hold a higher degree, while 35.0% hold secondary certificates. However, it was clear that most of them were employed, with 39.5% civil servants 29.5% self-employed (see table 1).

The study revealed that the majority of the respondents, 59.0% were aware of the coronavirus infection because it is a global pandemic. Governments, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, religious leaders, and the general public are emphasizing the pandemic. The people became aware of the virus due to the government's strict measures, including the lockdown of cities, schools, worship places (mosques and churches), and markets. Similarly, a study by Olapegba et al. (2020) indicates that a large proportion of the participants were aware and knowledgeable about the COVID-19 pandemic and its presence in Nigeria. More ever, our study revealed that a significant number of the 40% see the global pandemic as a normal health condition. They perceived the pandemic as normal even though it has killed and hospitalized many. Although the fatality rates from the pandemic in the state are little compared to the rest of the world, especially the worst hits countries like the USA, Brazil, India, and Europe. Therefore, they, however, perceived it this way because of the small number of cases and rates of deaths the state and the country recorded. In this current study, there was no significant negative relationship between knowledge of COVID-19 and the perceived risk of infection. People are aware of the infection yet do not perceive the risk associated with it. Contrary, in other studies, individuals with more knowledge of COVID-19 might have a greater sense of control over the epidemic situation, thus feeling less threatened by it (Li et al., 2020).

Interestingly, in this study, the majority of the respondents, 50.5%, do not know the danger associated with the pandemic (see table 2). Therefore, individuals have not taken the pandemic seriously. However, not only do they perceive it as normal, but they do not know the danger of the infection because of the rate of deaths and hospitalization in Nigeria. Moreover, many of those admitted in hospitals or deaths were elderly who have underline illnesses or history of health complications like hypertension, diabetes, and many more. Similarly, the study revealed that older people are more vulnerable to the impact of COVID-19 than others, both physically (Rothan & Byrareddy, 2020) and mentally (Armitage & Nellums, 2020).

Our study revealed that the level of fatality among youths directly affects their perception. The study also revealed that people do not adhere to covid-19 preventive measures. Where 67.0% of the respondents answered that they were not using any methods of preventing the spread of the virus, however, 87.5% do not wash their hands regularly or use hand sanitizer, while washing hands regularly can prevent the spread of the virus. The sanitizer used can reduce the risk of contracting the virus, but significant numbers of the respondents do not use it. It is also clear that some respondents do not know the importance of sanitizer before the pandemic period. This is perhaps the reason why most people do not use it.

Our study also revealed that facemask was not given any attention where only 21% of the respondents used facemask to prevent the spread while 79.0% did not use it. Most people do not use facemasks, especially in crowded places; this has contributed to the spread of the virus because facemasks can prevent the spread, especially in developing countries. Moreover, the majority of the 92.0% do not maintain social distancing. The study revealed that people went on with their normal social activities during the pandemic. This does not conform to the study conducted by Lesanmi & Afolabi (2020), where 64.5% of the respondents used face masks and (48%) maintained social distancing for prevention.

Interestingly, 67.0% do not use any prevention and control of spreading the infection. This number indicates that the people perceived the virus as normal because only 33.0% used all the preventive measures. In contrast, Odeka & Akejelu (2020) study revealed that individuals have put in place measures to prevent the virus infection (95%). However, most were not contacted by any government agency (e.g., NCDC).

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study provided insights, which might support decision-makers to face future health emergencies by investigating the public perception of the health risk of COVID-19 in Borno State, Nigeria. This current study shows a high level of awareness about the coronavirus infection but a low level of compliance with the safety measures, where individuals viewed the situation as a normal health condition because the majority of the respondents do not know the danger of the virus. Therefore, it is the government's responsibility to create awareness in the community and explain the dangers of coronavirus infection. This can be achieved by involving the religious, community, and youth leaders and being transparent and accountable. It is also the government's responsibility through the NCDC and the Ministry of Health to carry people

alone on matters that affect their health needs; this way, trusts will be created and hence compliance by the community members. The study used a small sample size hence the need for further study; using a large sample size.

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