COVID-19: Knowledge, Practices, and Mental Health in Sub-Saharan Africa
Key Findings from a Phone Survey of Adults in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, and Nigeria

OVERVIEW: The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted millions of lives globally, but levels of knowledge and implementation of preventive practices related to COVID-19 in sub-Saharan Africa are unknown. Likewise, the mental health impacts of the pandemic are unknown in sub-Saharan Africa. To help fill these knowledge gaps and inform public policy responses, the ARISE Network undertook a multi-country survey to understand knowledge and practices related to COVID-19 as well as broad impacts of the crisis on households in sub-Saharan Africa.

PREVENTIVE PRACTICES

Most respondents could identify basic preventive measures and reported regularly washing hands and wearing a face mask. However, some preventive practices were lower such as avoiding social gatherings (49%). 32% believed drinking alcohol could prevent COVID-19, and many believed vitamins and lemon or ginger tea were also preventive.

MENTAL HEALTH

Mild, moderate, and severe psychological distress was reported by 20.6%, 5.9%, and 1.1% of participants, respectively. Overall, most participants were classified as having no anxiety or depression during this period.

STUDY BACKGROUND

The social, economic, and indirect health effects of COVID-19 and its containment efforts will be deep and long-lasting. To better understand these effects in sub-Saharan Africa, the ARISE Network is conducting rapid phone surveys with adults, adolescents, and healthcare providers.

In this survey, we interviewed 1,797 adults across one urban and one rural site in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, and Nigeria. Our primary aim was to understand knowledge, perceptions, and practices related to COVID-19 and impacts of the pandemic on mental health. Adults aged 20 years and above were sampled from Health and Demographic Surveillance Systems and other surveys. Computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI) were conducted in local languages from July to November 2020.

The ARISE Network is conducting additional surveys including new topics and additional countries over the coming months to continue building the evidence base on various impacts of COVID-19 in sub-Saharan Africa.
**Knowledge of COVID-19 symptoms, prevention measures, and transmission methods**

*Knowledge level*
- Perfect knowledge (answered all questions correctly)
- Good knowledge (answered >=80% but not all correctly)
- Fair-Poor knowledge (answered <80% correctly)

**Self-reported prevalence of preventive measures**

- Regularly washing hands with soap and water: 95%
- Wearing face mask: 83%
- Keeping physical distance from everyone who is not family: 68%
- Keeping distance from sick people: 62%
- Stopped going to social gatherings, churches or mosques: 49%
- Disinfecting surfaces: 45%
- Changing/canceling travel plans: 30%
- Stocking up on food, home supplies and medicine: 18%

**Psychological distress levels**

- Severe: 1%
- Moderate: 8%
- Mild: 14%
- None: 28%
- Rural vs. Urban

**Policy Recommendations**

Understanding COVID-19-related knowledge and practices of adults, as well as their mental health status during this pandemic, is crucial for the design of targeted interventions and risk communication strategies. Our findings underscore key policy prescriptions:

1. While knowledge regarding COVID-19 is high, interventions are needed to increase the uptake of recommended preventive practices among adults in sub-Saharan Africa.
2. Certain misconceptions related to COVID-19 transmission mechanisms are common, and actions are needed to disseminate accurate information on COVID-19.
3. Public health officials need to formulate or intensify risk communication strategies on COVID-19 through the communication channels most utilized by target populations.

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