

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.

COVID-19 AWARENESS

14%

knew someone with COVID-19

95% of respondents believed the COVID-19 pandemic is real, and 14% knew someone who had been sick from COVID-19.



TRANSMISSION KNOWLEDGE

90%

correctly identified main transmission methods

Most respondents correctly identified the main COVID-19 transmission methods, but over half believed in misconceptions such as transmission through mosquito bites. Being male, being older, having more education, residing in an urban area, and believing the pandemic is real were factors positively associated with knowledge of COVID-19 transmission mechanisms.



PREVENTIVE PRACTICES

91%

correctly identified basic preventive methods

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

21%

reported mild psychological distress

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.



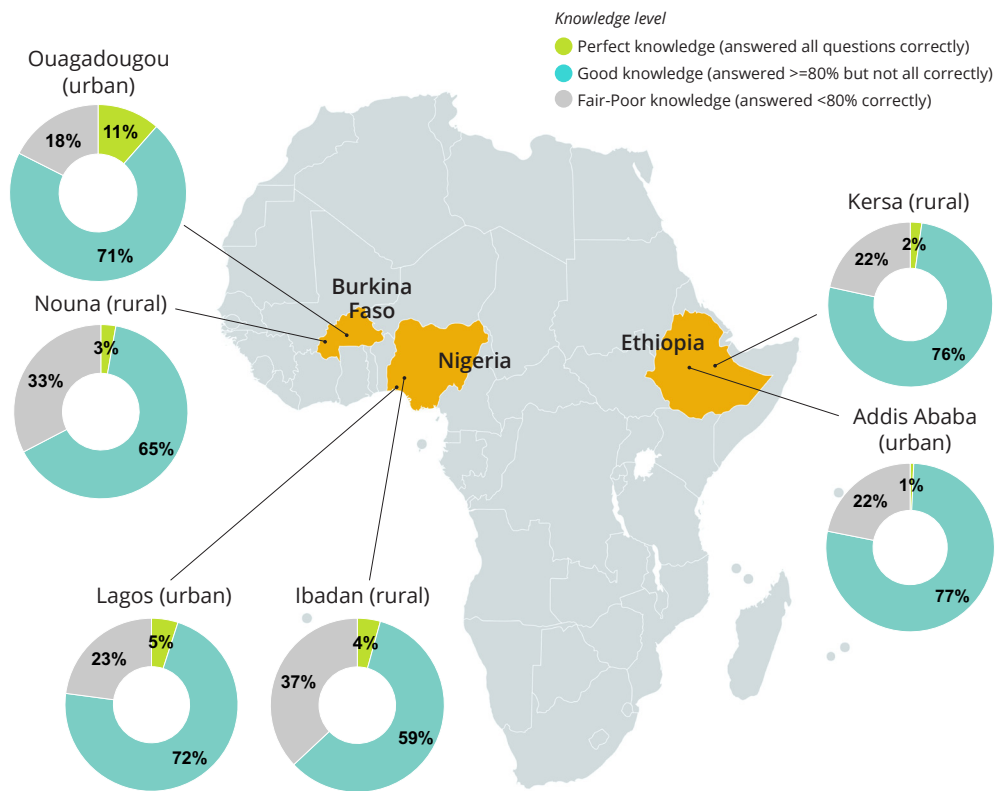
STUDY BACKGROUND

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.

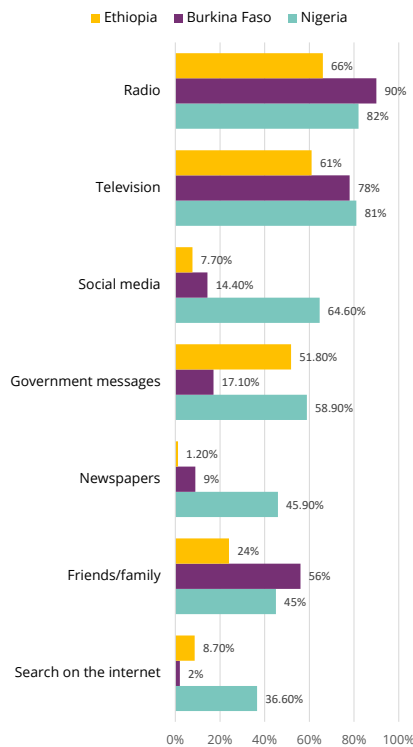
In this survey, we interviewed 1,797 adults across one urban and one rural site in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, and Nigeria. Our primary aim was to understand knowledge, perceptions, and practices related to COVID-19 and impacts of the pandemic on mental health. Adults aged 20 years and above were sampled 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

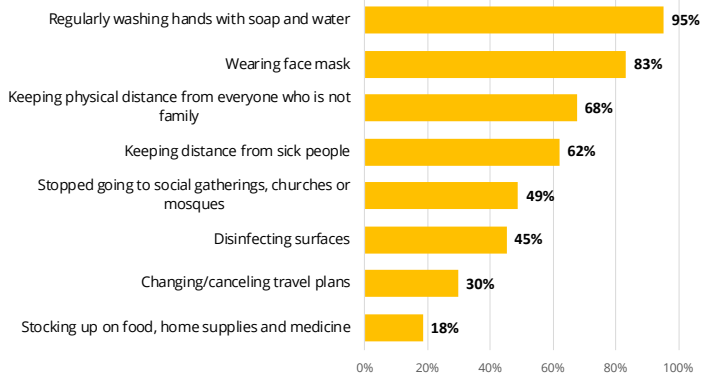


Sources of information on COVID-19

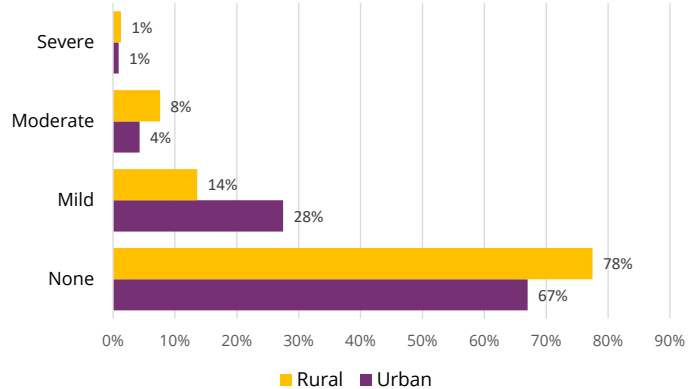


*Note: Counts and percentages do not add up to the total because the selection of multiple responses was allowed.

Self-reported prevalence of preventive measures



Psychological distress levels



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.

This study was undertaken by the Africa Research, Implementation Science, and Education (ARISE) Network and supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Heidelberg Institute of Global Health, and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. For more information, see Workneh et al. (in press). Knowledge and Practice Related to COVID-19 and Mental Health among Adults in Sub-Saharan Africa. *American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*, 2021.