

COVID-19 and Healthcare Providers in Sub-Saharan Africa

Key Findings from a Phone Survey in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, and Nigeria



OVERVIEW: Healthcare providers (HCPs) are at the forefront of the COVID-19 pandemic and are at risk due to potential exposure to COVID-19 patients. Poor knowledge of COVID-19 among HCPs leads to delayed diagnosis and shapes their perceptions and practice of preventive and infection control measures. To better understand the knowledge, perceptions, and practices of HCPs in sub-Saharan Africa and inform public policy responses, the ARISE Network undertook a multi-country study in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, and Nigeria.

COVID KNOWLEDGE



95%
or more identified shortness of breath, weakness, fever, and dry cough as symptoms

While over 95% of HCPs recognized the severe and main symptoms of COVID-19, fewer recognized skin rash (22%) and other less common symptoms. Awareness of prevention and transmission methods was very high, but only 80% of HCPs in Nigeria correctly identified cellular mobile networks as a false transmission method, and 81% of HCPs in Ethiopia correctly identified mosquito bites as a false transmission method.

PERCEPTIONS OF COVID



82%
perceived of themselves at high or very high risk of COVID-19

About 45%, 28%, and 29% of the participants in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, and Nigeria, respectively, perceived of themselves at a very high risk of contracting COVID-19. 90% of all participants were concerned about the spread of COVID-19.

COVID IN THE WORKPLACE



66%
received training on management and treatment of COVID-19

83% of the HCPs in Burkina Faso, 61% in Ethiopia, and 98% in Nigeria had workplace guidelines for COVID-19. Levels of training or formal orientation on managing COVID-19 were lowest in Burkina Faso.

MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING



74%
experienced stigma due to their profession

46% of HCPs experienced social avoidance or rejection. While most HCPs in Burkina Faso (59%) and Nigeria (86%) experienced social acknowledgment, only 25% in Ethiopia did. In Burkina Faso, 13% and 10% of HCPs reported anxiety and depression, respectively.

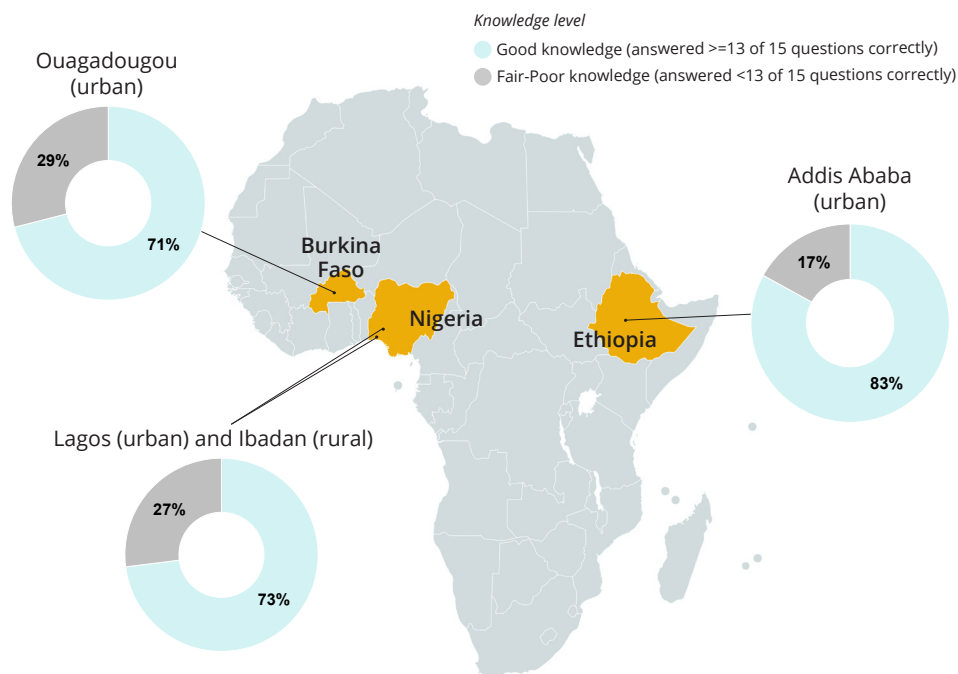
STUDY BACKGROUND

Understanding HCPs' COVID-19 knowledge, perceptions, and practices is crucial in order to identify effective strategies to contain the virus and safeguard HCPs' physical and mental health. Identifying gaps in knowledge, perceptions, and preventive measures will help guide interventions to improve HCPs' ability to respond to the pandemic.

In this survey, the ARISE Network conducted rapid phone-based interviews with 900 HCPs in urban settings in three sub-Saharan African countries, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, and Nigeria. HCPs who exclusively practice medicine or nursing in urban areas of each country were sampled using lists from professional health care associations. Computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI) were conducted in local languages from July to November 2020.

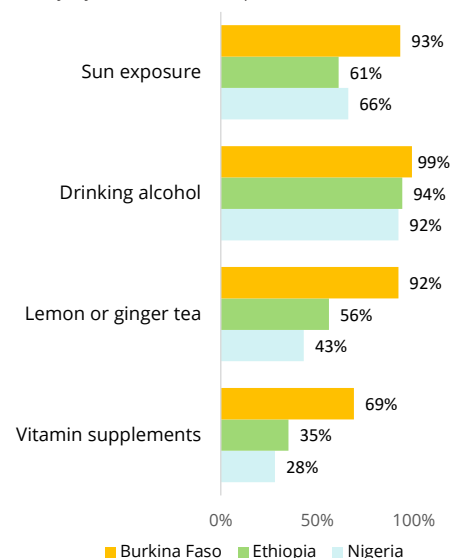
The ARISE Network is conducting additional surveys including new topics and additional countries over the coming months to continue building the evidence base on various impacts of COVID-19 in sub-Saharan Africa.

Health care providers' knowledge of COVID-19 symptoms, prevention measures, and transmission methods

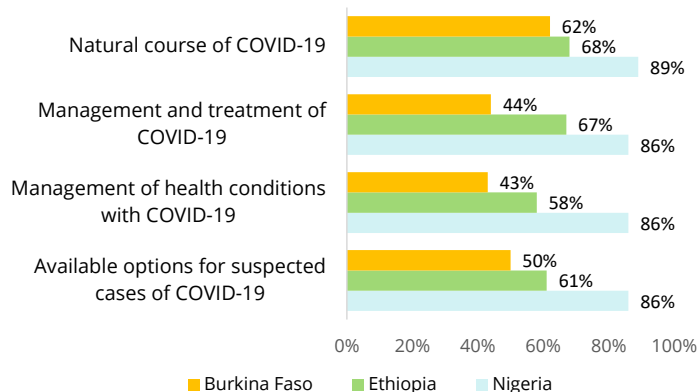


HCPs correctly identifying the following preventive measures as myths

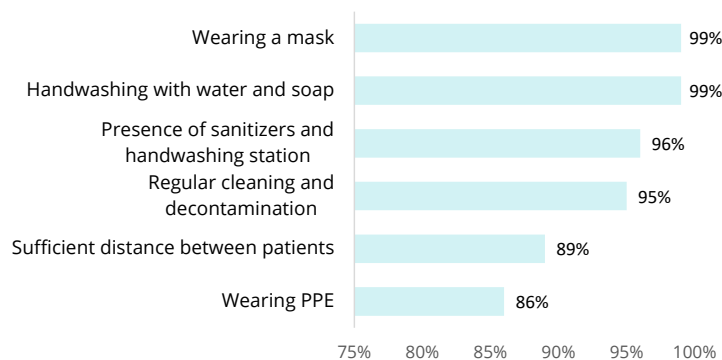
While knowledge of appropriate symptoms, prevention measures, and transmission methods was very high among respondents, a substantial portion of HCPs did not correctly identify myths about COVID-19 prevention as false.



HCPs receiving training or formal orientation on aspects of care during COVID-19



COVID-19 preventive measures available in the workplaces of HCPs across sites



Policy Recommendations

The collection and utilization of robust data on knowledge, perceptions, preventive practices, and the mental health status of HCPs is essential in mitigating the pandemic and enabling the design of future intervention strategies that may decrease the mental health burden and stigma of frontline HCPs while enabling their success in caring for their communities. Our findings underscore the following policy recommendations:

1. Urgent actions are needed to improve HCPs' perceptions and compliance with prevention measures of COVID-19.
2. As knowledge, perceptions, and preventive practices may vary by the caseload, epidemic curve, and death toll of a specific area, an intersectoral approach is needed to increase compliance with prevention measures and correct perceptions.
3. Health programs and policies are needed to minimize psychological morbidity and violence toward HCPs, as these may protect and motivate HCPs individually while increasing system readiness for subsequent health crises.

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 Assefa et al. (in press). COVID-19 Knowledge, Perception, Preventive Measures, Stigma, and Mental Health Among Healthcare Workers in Three Sub-Saharan African Countries: A Phone Survey. *American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*, 2021.