DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/gjedr.v21i1.3

GLOBAL JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH VOL 21, 2022: 17-25
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PERSONAL VARIABLES AND ATTITUDE OF YOUTHS TO LASSA FEVER PREVENTIVE PRACTICES IN BWARI AREA COUNCIL ABUJA, NIGERIA: COUNSELLING IMPLICATIONS

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(Received 24, November 2021; Revision Accepted 9, February 2022)

ABSTRACT

The study investigated the influence of personal variables on the attitude of Youths in Bwari Area Council Abuja, Nigeria to Lassa fever preventive practices. The study used the descriptive survey design. Using the snowball sampling technique proposed by Jones (1997) and used by Denwigwe and Ezekwe (2017), a sample of 200 youths was selected from the study area. Four hypotheses were formulated for the study and tested at 0.05 level of significance. A researcher-made questionnaire known as the personal variables and attitude to Lassa fever preventive practices questionnaire (PVALPPQ) was used as the instrument for data collection. The population t-test and independent t-test were the statistical techniques for data analysis. Findings revealed that the attitude of youths in Bwari Area Council Abuja, Nigeria to Lassa fever preventive practices was negative, gender did not significantly influence youth's attitude while youths' education status and family type influenced youths' attitude to Lassa fever preventive practices. Recommendations were stated such as counselling youths on the strategies for Lassa fever disease prevention.

KEYWORDS: Personal Variables, Attitude, Youths, Lassa Fever, Prevention.

INTRODUCTION

The Lassa fever disease is one of the deadly diseases that have been experienced in Nigeria. The disease occurs seasonally, especially in the dry season but sometimes it occurs in the rainy season. Its outbreak is associated with so much concern by many. According to Obinna (2018), it is a viral disease that goes with some symptoms which include fever, malaise, headache, sore throat, muscle pain, chest pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, cough, and abdominal pain. The symptoms may also progress to facial oedema, mucosal bleeding, disorientation, coma, and death in the late stages. Ilesanmi, Omotoso, Alele, and Adewuyi (2015) added headache, body weakness, and fever that is unresponsive to antimalarial medicine and antibiotics to the list of the most common symptoms.

The first outbreak of Lassa fever in Nigeria was at Lassa in Borno State, in the year 1969 when two missionary nurses died of it. According to Wogu (2018) and Adefisan (2014), Lassa fever as an endemic acute viral haemorrhagic disease was first discovered in Sierra Leone in the 1950s but the virus responsible for the infection was not known until 1969 when it claimed the lives of two missionary nurses. Odubanjo (2020) also

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reported the worsening trend of the disease and asserted that it has spread from just two states in 1969 to 23 states in 2019. Odubanjo further revealed that since its first diagnosis in 1969, the situation has increasingly gotten worse over the years and cited the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC's) report of 2018 as the largest ever number of cases in Nigeria, with over 600 confirmed cases and over 170 deaths, with the number still rising. Even with the outcry over the outrageous increase in 2018, the reported number of suspected cases rose in 2019. The World Health Organization (2017a) had tagged Nigeria as a nation in which the Lassa fever is endemic. This could lead to the social problem of stigmatization against survivors within the nation and against the country by other nations. Olowookere, Adegbenro, Idowu, Omisore, Shabi, Ikem, Ekwere, Odeinde, (2017) asserted that there is some degree of stigmatization against persons with Lassa fever.

Nigerian Government and Non-Governmental Organizations have made some positive strides to curtail the spread of the disease. One of the steps taken to avert the spread of Lassa fever is public enlightenment. Worgu (2018) asserted that the Ebonyi State Government in 2016 embarked on community sensitization campaigns across 13 Local Government Areas using town unions, traditional rulers, and religious institutions. Adebimpe (2015 a,b,c), Picard and Yeo (2011) revealed that the aim of the sensitization and awareness campaigns was to provide information to the populace on the cause of Lassa fever, its symptoms, consequences, and prevention methods. The media (particularly social media, radio, and television), and Lassa fever health education were the veritable instruments used for creating the needed awareness. According to Abiakam (2020), the National Orientation Agency (NOA) in Abia State Nigeria carried out an enlightenment programme to create an awareness of Lassa fever among the citizenry of Abia State and to educate them on the preventive measures. The NOA was quoted to have revealed that the Social Mobilization Technical Committee (SOMTEC) of UNICEF was created to investigate the strategies of engaging an aggressive public awareness of the disease to achieve effective prevention and containment.

To lend credence to the struggle for the prevention of Lassa fever, the United Nations Organization's (2018) recommendations on the reduction of rats-to-human transmission included removing the source of attraction for rats, preventing rats from entering the house, avoiding contact with infected rats, promoting good community hygiene to discourage rodents from entering homes, cooking all animal products thoroughly, taking preventive precautions against contact with patient's secretions when caring for patients with Lassa fever. Included in the preventive steps are educating people in high-risk areas on how to reduce rat populations in the homes, engaging with communities to promote desired health practices and behaviours, including environmental hygiene and food consumption, and accurate and timely health advice and information on the disease. The Alliance for International Medical Action (ALIMA, 2018) had reported among other things, to engage in public awareness campaigns in conjunction with the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and Federal and State Health Authorities in Nigeria. The International Federation of Red Cross has also done a lot to educate the public on the issue of Lassa fever.

These efforts by government and non-governmental organizations notwithstanding, a lot needs to be done to ensure that the Lassa Fever outbreak in Nigeria is reduced to the barest minimum. According to Balogun (2017), the fatality of Lassa fever both among children, young, and adults is attributable to certain factors such as poor knowledge of the disease, unfavourable perception, and practices, especially unhygienic practices. Studies have been done on Lassa fever targeting people at various levels, but much work has not been done with respect to youths. The youth if groomed can obviously contribute a lot to the eradication of the Lassa fever disease and that is why this study is embarked on to see if personal variables affect the attitude of youths towards Lassa fever preventive practices. It is unfortunate to note that the youth can easily be infected by this virus considering their peculiarities in terms of their character traits, disposition, interactions, and activities.

The National Youth Development Policy (2001) as cited by Denwigwe (2015) described the youths as the foundation of a society and stated that their energies, inventiveness, character, and orientation define the pace of development and security of a nation. The policy further stated that through the creative talents and labour power of youths, a nation makes giant strides in economic developments and socio-political attainments. Sanders (2013) described youths as being very mobile, experimental, risk-taking, and vulnerable. National Youth Policy (2019) indicated that youth health challenges in Nigeria are multiple, have

behavioural roots and preventable, and that many youths do not have access to health facilities. Youths are usually overwhelmed by the news of an easy spread of the virus and the associated danger, but unfortunately, they may lack the needed information about the virus.

This probably is a pointer to the type of attitude that can be exhibited towards preventive practices. For instance, it has been observed that a good number of youths unknowingly do certain things that predispose them to the Lassa fever virus. They habitually consume 'garri' (cassava flakes) with sugar soaked in cold water, when they are hungry. This is not very safe because most often the women who process the 'garri' in rural areas spread it out in the sun to dry, during which the multimammate rat infected with the Lassa fever virus could urinate and defaecate over it, thereby contaminating it. When the unsuspecting youths purchase and consume the 'garri' without heating it, they easily get the Lassa fever disease. Youths also eat dry cassava chips soaked in water as snacks. These are often also poorly processed and exposed to the urine of infected rats and so predisposes the consumers to the Lassa fever virus. Thus, the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC, 2016) cited by Balogun (2017) has advised on the need to properly cook food before consumption to avoid infection. Another way the youth encourage the spreading of the Lassa fever disease is through bush burning. As asserted by Fisher-Hoch (2005) cited by Balogun (2017) meat-hungry youths may carry out bush burning in the savanna during the dry season, and thus cause the rodents (which may harbour the Lassa fever virus) and other animals to run into the homes.

The dirty habits of some youths especially those living in dirty environments predispose them to viral disease. Dirty surroundings attract the rats into the houses, and they can contaminate food items that are not properly covered. Person to person transmission of the disease among youths is also common due to their habits of indiscriminate kissing, sexual intercourse, sneezing and coughing, and so on. The youths may not also realize the need to block the holes through which rats run into their homes and so they may be living with the havoc-causing rats. Okorie and Mbalisi (2018) attributed the worrisome incidence of the outbreak of Lassa fever to the indiscriminate waste disposal habit of people. According to them, waste that is not properly disposed of attracts rodents which are the primary carriers of the Lassa virus that causes Lassa fever.

To be worried about the existence of the virus is one thing, another is doing the right thing to prevent it. For the Lassa fever virus to be eradicated, the attitudes of people especially youths matter a lot. Their attitudes could go a long way to preventing the virus or promoting its outbreak. Cherry (2020) described the attitude as a set of emotions, beliefs, and behaviours toward an object, person, thing, or event. Attitudes are often the result of experience or upbringing, and they can have a powerful influence over behaviour; attitudes are enduring, but they can also change (Vaughn-Furlow 2017, and Cherry, 2020). Psychologists define attitudes as a learned tendency to evaluate things in a certain way and this can include evaluations of people, issues, objects, or events; such evaluations are often positive or negative, but they can also be uncertain at times (Cherry, 2020). According to Collins Dictionary Online (2018), attitude is the way one thinks and feels about something, especially when this shows in the way one behaves. It was probably in view of this that Denwigwe (2015) suggested the need to equip youths with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that are necessary to transform them into well-adjusted citizens. Exercises that promote the inculcation of the right attitudes among youths should be encouraged. Bad habits should also be discouraged among the youths. Denwigwe and Ezekwe (2019) asserted that it is good to avoid bad habits such as not having one's bathe regularly, not brushing the teeth, wearing dirty clothes, nail-biting, and so on.

The researchers were also interested in whether personal variables of youths such as gender, family type, and educational status could have anything to do with their attitudes to the Lassa fever preventive practices. Gender as a personal variable in this study refers to the sex of a person either as a male or a female, boy or girl, man, or woman. Family type refers to whether one comes from a monogamous or polygamous family while educated enough youths in this study are those who can read and write and have secondary school certificate and above. Those who are below the secondary school level of education and who cannot read and write are seen in this study as illiterates. If attitude involves a person's disposition or orientation towards something, then it can be said that one's family can impact how he does things or reasons towards issues. This is probably why Anigbogu (2010) opined that children from monogamous families develop a better attitude towards issues because their parents are closer to them and show commitment

to their responsibilities than those from polygamous homes. It is likely too, that an illiterate person may not understand the dangers of the Lassa fever disease and how to prevent it. It is possible that illiteracy can predispose youths to the possession of a negative attitude.

At this juncture, it is necessary to review some empirical works on Lassa fever in Nigeria. Ogboghodo, Adam, Omuemu, and Okoye (2019) investigated the knowledge, attitude, and preventive practices against Lassa fever among residents in a rural community in Southern Nigeria. Their findings indicated that the majority of the respondents representing 89% had heard of Lassa fever, out of this number, 82.9% had poor knowledge of Lassa fever, and 85.3% had a positive attitude towards Lassa fever preventive measures. Over half (59.1%) had poor preventive practices against Lassa fever. Knowledge, attitude, and preventive practice were found to be better among educated respondents. Uduak (2018) investigated the knowledge, attitude, and practices to Lassa fever virus among shop owners in four community markets in a military barrack in Kaduna State, Nigeria, and discovered a good knowledge and positive attitude of respondents towards preventive practices of Lassa fever.

Balogun (2017) revealed a significant relationship between respondents' gender and knowledge of Lassa fever prevention. Ekanem, Ekwere, Akwaowo, Akpanekpo, Mbaba, Monday, Umoh, and Akwaowo (2018), however, revealed from the investigation of knowledge and prevention of Lassa fever among adults in a rural community in Southern Nigeria that gender was not significantly associated with prevention of Lassa fever. Ekanem et al (2018) cited the study on Awareness of Lassa fever in a rural community in Southwest Nigeria by Ilessanmi, Omotoso, Alele, and Adewuyi (2015) as revealing that respondents with tertiary education were more aware of Lassa fever prevention compared to those with a secondary level of education and below. Ighedosa, Odigie, Usifo, and Osadolor (2016) in a study on knowledge, attitude, and practice of Lassa fever prevention by students of the University of Benin found that the level of study of students was significantly associated with Lassa fever preventive practices, while Usuwa et al (2020) in their study on knowledge and risk perception towards Lassa fever infection among residents of affected communities in Ebonyi State, Nigeria revealed that the educational level (including that of youths) had no association with perception of benefits of Lassa fever preventive practices. Against this background, the researchers investigated personal variables and attitudes of youths to Lassa fever preventive practices in Bwari Area Council, Abuja, Nigeria.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study and were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. The attitude of youths in Bwari Area Council Abuja, Nigeria to Lassa fever preventive practices is not significantly positive.
2. There is no significant influence of gender on the attitude of youths in Bwari Area Council Abuja, Nigeria towards Lassa fever preventive practices.
3. There is no significant influence of youths' education status on the attitude of youths in Bwari Area Council Abuja, Nigeria towards Lassa fever preventive practices.
4. Family type does not significantly influence the attitude of youths in Bwari Area Council Abuja, Nigeria towards Lassa fever preventive practices.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a descriptive survey that investigated personal variables and attitudes of youths in Bwari Area Council Abuja, Nigeria to Lassa fever preventive practices. The population comprised all the youths in Bwari Area Council Abuja, Nigeria. Using the snowball sampling technique proposed by Jones (1997) a sample of 200 youths (114 males and 86 females) was selected from Bwari Area Council Abuja, Nigeria. Firstly, some youths who showed interest in the study were approached, and they contacted other youths who were ready to participate in the study as respondents. A researcher-made, four-point Likert-like questionnaire termed 'personal variables and attitude to Lassa fever preventive practices questionnaire (PVALPQ)' with the options strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, and strongly disagreed was used for data collection. Section A of the questionnaire elicited information on personal variables (gender, youths' educational status, and family type) while section B with 20 items provided information on attitude to Lassa fever preventive practices. The positively worded items were scored 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively while the negatively worded items were scored in the reverse order. Two experts each from Guidance and Counselling and Measurement and Evaluation Departments in the University of Calabar, Nigeria helped to validate

this instrument by reading through it to make relevant corrections and suggestions. A pilot test using 40 respondents (students) from the University of Abuja who were not part of the study participants but had similar characteristics with them, gave a test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.8. The instruments for data analysis were the population t-test and independent t-test. With the help of some research assistants trained by the researcher, the questionnaires were administered on the respondents.

RESULTS

A hypothesis-by-hypothesis presentation of the result was done after testing each hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis 1

The attitude of youths in Bwari Area Council Abuja, Nigeria to Lassa fever preventive practices is not significantly positive. The summary of the population t test analysis of the attitude of youths to Lassa fever preventive practices is presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1: Population t-test analysis of the attitude of youths to Lassa Fever preventive practices.

Variable	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t-cal.
Attitude of Youths	200	29.85	2.4612	.862
Test value or reference mean		30		

Significant at .05 level, df = 199, critical t-value = 1.96

Looking at the result in Table 1, it can be observed that the calculated t- value was .862 while the critical t-value was 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance with 199 degrees of freedom. With the calculated t being less than the critical t, the research hypothesis 1 which stated that the attitude of youths in Bwari Area Council Abuja, Nigeria to Lassa fever preventive practices is not significantly positive was retained, and the alternative was rejected. In other words, the attitude of youths in Bwari Area Council Abuja, Nigeria to Lassa fever preventive practices is significantly negative.

Hypothesis 2.

There is no significant influence of gender on the attitude of youths in Bwari Area Council Abuja, Nigeria towards Lassa fever preventive practices. The summary of the independent t-test analysis of the influence of gender on the attitude of youths to Lassa fever preventive practices is presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2: Independent t-test analysis of the influence of gender on the attitude of youths to Lassa Fever preventive practices.

Gender	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t-value
Male	114	57.7719	21.27570	1.5
Female	86	53.0233	22.49548	

Significant at .05 level, df = 198, critical t-value = 1.96

The result in Table 2 revealed that the calculated t- value of 1.5 was less than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance with 198 degrees of freedom. Based on this, the hypothesis 2 which stated that there is no significant influence of gender on the attitude of youths in Bwari Area Council Abuja, Nigeria towards Lassa fever preventive practices was retained.

Hypothesis 3.

There is no significant influence of youths' education status on the attitude of youths in Bwari Area Council Abuja, Nigeria towards Lassa fever preventive practices. The summary of the independent t test analysis of the influence of parental education on the attitude of youths to Lassa fever preventive practices is presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3: Independent t-test analysis of the influence of youths' education on the attitude of youths to Lassa Fever preventive practices.

Youths' education status	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	t-value
Literate youths	126	69.0952	13.99796	18.701
Illiterate youths	74	32.9730	11.67244	

Significant at .05 level, df = 198, critical t-value = 1.96

The result in Table 3 revealed that the calculated t- value of 18.701 was greater than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance with 198 degrees of freedom. Based on this, the hypothesis 3 which stated that there is no significant influence of youths' education status on the attitude of youths in Bwari Area Council Abuja, Nigeria towards Lassa fever preventive measures was rejected. It follows that youths' education status influences the attitude of youths to Lassa fever preventive practices. The mean for literate youths being 69.09 showed that literacy had more influence on the attitude of youths in Bwari Area Council Abuja, Nigeria towards Lassa fever preventive measures than illiteracy, because the mean for illiterate youths was 32.97.

Hypothesis 4.

Family type does not significantly influence the attitude of youths in Bwari Area Council Abuja, Nigeria towards Lassa fever preventive practices. The result of the analysis on hypothesis 4 is shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4: Summary of independent t-test result on the influence of monogamous and polygamous family types on the attitude of youths to Lassa Fever preventive practices.

Family type	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	t-value
Monogamy	136	66.9555	15.47656	15.945
Polygamy	64	31.8700	12.19875	

Significant at .05 level, df = 198, critical t-value = 1.96

As shown in Table 4, the results of the analysis revealed that the calculated t- value was 15.94 while the critical t-value was 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance with 198 degrees of freedom. The value of the calculated t was greater than the critical t. Based on this, research hypothesis 4 which stated that family type did not significantly influence the attitude of youths in Bwari Area Council Abuja, Nigeria towards Lassa fever preventive practices was rejected while the alternative hypothesis was accepted. This means that family type influenced the attitude of youths to Lassa fever preventive practices. Monogamous family type with a mean of 66.95 influenced the attitude of youths to Lassa fever preventive practices more than polygamous family type with a mean of 31.87.

DISCUSSION

The finding on hypothesis 1 showed that the attitude of youths in Bwari Area Council Abuja, Nigeria, to Lassa fever preventive practice was negative. This is in line with the findings by Olowookere, Adegbenro, Idowu and Omisore et al (2017) on a descriptive cross-sectional study of 400 adult residents of Ile-Ife, Southwest Nigeria on the knowledge, attitude and practices toward Lassa fever control and prevention, which revealed that the knowledge, attitude, and preventive practices to Lassa fever were poor. The attitude of Youths in Bwari Area Council Abuja, Nigeria to Lassa fever preventive practices is therefore poor or negative. This is not in line with the study by Uduak (2018) which reported a positive attitude of respondents to Lassa fever prevention practices.

The finding on hypothesis 2 revealed that gender has no significant influence on the attitude of the youth of Bwari Area Council Abuja, Nigeria to Lassa fever preventive practices. This is in line with the finding by Ekanem, Ekwere, Akwaowo, Akpanekpo, Mbaba, Monday, Umoh, and Akwaowo (2018). The finding on hypothesis 3 is that the level of education of the youths influenced their attitude to Lassa fever preventive practice. Knowledge, attitude, and preventive practice were found to be better among educated respondents (Ogboghodo, Adam, Omuemu, and Okoye, 2019). The view by Ogboghodo, Adam, Omuemu, and Okoye (2019) therefore supports the finding that education of the youths influenced the youths' attitude to Lassa fever preventive practices. It is also in line with the finding by Ilesanmi, Omotoso, Alele, and Adewuyi

(2015) and Ekanem et al (2018) that respondents with tertiary education were more aware of Lassa fever preventive practices compared to those with secondary level and below. The finding on hypothesis 4 revealed that the family type of the youths influenced the attitude of youths to Lassa fever preventive Practices. This is because those from monogamous homes probably receive more care and attention which will help them to develop positive attitudes.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study revealed that the attitude of youths in Bwari Area Council Abuja, Nigeria to Lassa fever preventive practices is negative, the educational status of the youths and their family type significantly influenced their attitudes to Lassa fever preventive practices. It was therefore recommended that efforts should be made by government and non-governmental organizations to help improve the attitude of youths to the Lassa fever preventive practices. It was also recommended that an enabling environment for proper education for youths should be created in the schools since education influences the attitude of youths who can play a big role in the fight against Lassa fever. Being that family type is also a deciding factor on the type of attitude displayed by youths towards Lassa fever preventive practices, parents need to seriously weigh the pros and cons before choosing their family type.

COUNSELLING IMPLICATIONS:

Lassa fever has been recognised as a disease with high public health significance all over the globe because it is highly infectious. This implies the need for counsellors to spearhead public enlightenment campaigns both at the national, state and Local Government levels to educate people on the preventive practices against the Lassa fever disease. Such campaigns should target the youth who are the leaders of tomorrow and who when properly informed about the virus and its preventive measures will be able to seriously fight for the eradication of it. Hygienic practices such as high level of environmental sanitation should be encouraged. Youths should be counselled on the need to be schooled effectively. Lifestyle changes which include engaging in monogamy rather than polygamy should be emphasized. All hands are expected to be on deck to improve the preventive practices against the spread of Lassa Fever virus and disease.

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