

Community-level prevention measures against Lassa fever in Benue State, Nigeria

Atule Aondoemba Amos¹, Mobolaji Modinat Salawu^{1,*}

¹Department of Epidemiology and Medical Statistics, Faculty of Public Health, College of Medicine, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

***Corresponding author:** Mobolaji Modinat Salawu, Department of Epidemiology and Medical Statistics, Faculty of Public Health, College of Medicine, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. **Email:** aondodoo77@gmail.com

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Introduction

Lassa fever is a viral hemorrhagic fever endemic in West Africa with a sporadic outbreak pattern in Nigeria. Prevention at the community level remains deficient despite public health interventions due to gaps in knowledge, attitudes, and implementation of preventive measures. This study examined the knowledge, attitudes, and preventive practices regarding Lassa fever as well as barriers to effective implementation among community members in Benue State Southeastern Nigeria.

Methods

A cross-sectional survey was conducted among 1,088 participants who were selected through a multistage sampling technique. Data were collected using a semi-structured interviewer administered questionnaire. A 24-point knowledge scale scored respondents' knowledge as poor (0-8), fair (9-12), and good (13-24). Attitude was scored on a 44-point scale, scored as negative attitude (0-21) and positive attitude (22-44). Data were analysed using SPSS. Chi-square tests was employed to test for associations at 5% level of significance.

Results

Mean age of respondents was 34.6 ± 12.4 years. Of the respondents, 46.5% indicated they knew Lassa fever, but only 27.7% correctly named the disease as a viral hemorrhagic fever. Preventive practices such as rodent control and food storage were carried out

irregularly, with 50.2% never undertaking preventive activities. Significant factors identified as barriers to prevention were financial limitations, access barriers to healthcare, cultural beliefs, and poor waste management $p < 0.05$. Knowledge had a strong relationship with preventive behavior ($p < 0.001$) and barriers to implementation ($p < 0.001$).

Conclusion

This study shows the knowledge gaps in the application of Lassa fever preventive interventions. There is a need for increased public health education, enhanced healthcare facilities, and culturally adapted interventions to support and sustain effective prevention of Lassa fever.