

## **Covid-19 Protocol: Attitude and Practice among Business Entrepreneurs in Southwest Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*Measures taken to curtail the spread of the Covid-19 virus in Nigeria were very stringent. The lockdown, among others, affected businesses and households, as individuals found ways to cope with the measures. This study used the qualitative method to collect data from 30 participants in Lagos and Ibadan, and purposive sampling was used among consenting participants. The in-depth interview guide was used in data collection. The data were analyzed using NVivo 12 plus. Findings show the effect of lockdown order on daily life, family, and income flow. Compliance with Covid-19 protocol was differentiated, as most of the participants comply with the lockdown order but had difficulties with facemasks and physical/social distances order. We recommend that to halt other waves of Covid-19, the preventive protocol should be adhered to.*

**Keywords:** Covid-19, Lockdown, Perception, Protocol, Southwest Nigeria.

### **Introduction**

Comparing the number of Covid-19 cases and casualties in Asia, Central America, and Europe, Africa has the lower burden globally [1]. While this may be largely ascribed to differences in environmental conditions, the fact remains that the outbreak started later in Africa and the swift effort to curtail the spread of the virus. Africa has the largest proportion of less developed countries than other continents with a serious burden of infectious diseases, such as HIV, TB, Malaria, Ebola, and Schistosomiasis [2, 3], which is believed to have a possible negative impact on the continent fragile healthcare system. The Nigerian healthcare system is already overwhelmed [4] and could be worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic. Nigeria estimated population in 2018 before Covid-19 was

195,874,740 million [5], and she suffers from a lack of adequate medical supplies, hunger, and poverty.

In Nigeria, like many other countries, the pandemic, coupled with the government's response to lockdown policies, triggered stress, panic, and business paralysis [6]. During these periods, governments were expected to provide financial aid to support firms' operations and survival [7]. The closure of land, air, and sea borders; schools, colleges, universities; stores; and markets affected all and sundry, frustrated business activities, and took a toll on households and the country's economy [8, 9].

Consequently, the Covid-19-induced lockdown impairs the circular flow of income as the lockdown order in Nigeria involved strict restriction of movements, except for essential services [10]. This led to the inability of

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households to spend adequately, thereby resulting in a series of demand and supply shocks [11]. Moreover, the enforcement of lockdown and other related measures meant to curtail the Covid-19 pandemic was handled by the police [12]. However, the Nigerian State could not achieve total compliance due to a disconnect between the government and citizens, as many Nigerian police officers were alleged of engaging in unethical practices during the period [13]. This article explores how small business entrepreneurs in six major markets in Southwest Nigeria perceived the Covid-19 lockdown order and the protocol after easing the lockdown.

## Material and Methods

This study used the qualitative method to collect data from 30 participants in six different

market locations in Lagos and Ibadan metropolis (see Table 1). There were 19 females and 11 males with 16 participants from Ibadan and 14 from Lagos metropolis respectively. Purposive sampling was used among consenting participants. The in-depth interview guide was used in data collection. The analysis was done using thematic analysis of each of the interviews conducted, a process of analyzing qualitative data. Interviews transcripts were read severally after the transcriptions were done verbatim. During the process of reading the transcripts, codes were identified and created. This gives room for the identification and analysis of patterns that appeared within each of the participant's responses [14, 15].

**Table 1.** Socio-demographic Profile

Variables	Lagos	Ibadan
	Number of Participants	
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	5	6
Female	9	10
<b>Age (range)</b>		
Low	22	25
High	50	56
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Yoruba	8	10
Hausa/Fulani	2	3
Igbo	4	3
<b>Education</b>		
No education	--	3
Primary	2	4
Vocational education	4	3
Secondary	6	4
Tertiary	2	2
<b>Marital status</b>		
Married	2	4
Single	12	14
<b>Employment Types</b>		
Unemployed	--	--
Self-employed (business)	14	16
<b>Description of household Situation During Lockdown</b>		

Not enough money for basic things	10	12
Have money for basic things	4	4

Source: Fieldwork, 2022

Independently, codes were identified and created by coders, and where there is disagreement, a consensus is reached thereafter, categories were formed, and themes were identified. The data analysis was done using NVivo 12 plus software. To achieve the trustworthiness of the analysis, rigor in qualitative analysis is assessed within the context of dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability [16, 17]. To achieve this, systematic checking of the transcription, interpretation of the data, and documentation of the process were involved.

## Findings

### Effects of Lockdown Order

Participants expressed their experience with the Covid-19 lockdown order as it affected their daily living, family, and income flow. From the extract, some participants said:

*For me, the lockdown was necessary to reduce the spread of the virus but most of my colleagues here were very angry. You won't blame them because we depend on daily income to survive. In my case, I am lucky that my husband is a civil servant, so he provided for all our needs during the lockdown. I stayed at home throughout because I understand the reason for the lockdown (Female-35-Lagos-2).*

A male participant explains the effect of the lockdown.

*For the lockdown, people don't subscribe to the idea because it was so inconvenient and at the same time reduced the livelihood of every individual. Imagine someone to be staying inside the house (indoors) without going anywhere or attending to his/her business, how will such a person survive. Besides, there are some people who without going to work for a day, it will become difficult for them to fend for or feed their families. But there is nothing we can do to negate government opinion and order*

*in this country. Whether we are satisfied or not, we must abide by the authority as imposed (Male-40-Ibadan-7).*

This was corroborated by another participant:

*Often time we experience a business downturn that was even before the lockdown order. The lockdown was one month plus, we stayed at home and when it eventually relapsed, the Muslim fast commenced (Ramadan) and this made things extremely difficult. People begin to experience a financial crisis and the market is not profitable as it was before Covid-19. The virus hit hard in Nigeria; money is not circulated anymore. Both children and adults are feeling the pandemic even today (Female-41-Ibadan-9).*

Another female respondent complains bitterly about this and said:

*They just intentionally want to starve us, because there seems to be no Covid-19 in this country, they just locked us in the house for two months without food, water, and money and at a point when they ease the lockdown, it has already destroyed our businesses (Female-38-Ibadan-8).*

However, another respondent had another point of view:

*I was not able to come to the market then and there was no money we were just managing at that time. But thank God everything has come back to normal now. Sales are better now though people will still say there is no money, but we must eat (Female-45-Lagos-15).*

While the majority talk of their inability to go out of the house because of the lockdown one female participant did not take the lockdown order seriously because of her experience. She said: *they didn't lock down anything, they are just shouting lockdown, people are still coming and going it is just a bit more expensive, you must bribe the police on the road (Female-24-Ibadan-3).*

## **Compliance with Covid-19 Protocol**

Compliance with Covid-19 protocol was expressed by the participant as such:

*I use a face mask to prevent the disease from affecting me. Some say the use of a face mask does affect the way they breathe or that their ear will hurt them. Well for me I wear it always because I know it can protect me. On social distance also, we all must agree to give space even at the bus stop so that our bodies will not touch one another (Female-45-Lagos-15).*

However, a male participant expressed that it is difficult to comply:

*Haaa! This face mask is not easy at all. You can see that I have it, but I am not covering my face because my customers will not hear me. I am just hanging on my neck so that I don't enter 'Ijoba wahala' (government problem). How can someone cover their mouth and nose the whole day? Tell me, is it possible? You are wearing it because you are 'akoiwe' (educated), you are not selling in the market. Let me tell you, it is not possible in the market. See the meat section now, it is already demarcated for us. Except you don't want us to eat anymore. That facemask is only for office workers and not for 'Eleran' (Butcher). We are not observing it here at all (Male-50-Lagos-1).*

A female participant also noted that:

*The face mask is just like they are making life miserable for us because it seizes our breath at times. For example, is it good for an asthmatic patient to use a face mask for a long time without leading to a negative effect? We are just being fools with face masks. If I used the face mask within 30 minutes, I would notice that my breathing will change. Besides, we are tired of the face mask already, it does not have any meaning. As they have let us know the mode of transmission of Covid-19. Since the virus can be transmitted by touching a surface that a person that is having the virus has touched, then there is no reason for a face mask, meaning it is useless (Female-38-Ibadan-8).*

Another participant affirmed why they did not comply with the protocol.

*Aaaaaaa! They said we should be wearing face masks, but I don't like it. I bought one shaa! but I hardly wear it because I don't breathe very well when I put it on. Also, imagine as a business person in the market, how can I cover my nose and mouth to sell, will my customers hear what I am saying? It is not convenient for people in the market (Female-55-Lagos-3)*

This was corroborated by a male counterpart:

*Covering our noses together with our mouths is sometimes difficult because if I am communicating with my customers, they hardly hear me if I have my face mask on. Besides, the market is slowing down already, and with the few customers that would come and buy from us, we would not use a face mask to chase them away when communicating. As for me particularly, I don't use a face mask (Male-45-Ibadan-10).*

On social/physical distancing, participants participant was blunt on how that will not be possible in the market environment. A male respondent said:

*Hmm! we were forced to practice it but the truth is that we have been in this world for a long time mixing and relating together in a close manner and suddenly a law was enacted that we should stop touching ourselves and maintain physical distance, how then is it possible and how can it be practice easily. Even some people's facial expressions, if you are trying to physically adjust yourself, they might think you feel irritated because of their physical appearance. So, our understanding to maintain physical distance is not strong enough but the truth is that people are complying with it little by little just like we were told not to shake hands again, then we stopped it. Although, it is difficult to maintain it at the same time because is not human to keep distance from each other (Male-45-Ibadan-10).*

A female respondent said:

*That one is not possible in this market. Tell me how would I do it? Will I ask my neighbor to vacate her shop for me? Or should I stop attending to customers who want to buy medicine? I think the government is confused to be saying something like that. No market person can afford to practice this distance or whatever you call it (Female-55-Lagos-3).*

The market environment looks difficult to practice physical distance:

*In this market, physical distance does not work for me but if I am alone, I can easily position myself as I want. For instance, if I leave this market now and probably walk on the street and eventually a relative or friend walks up to me to greet me, it will be dishonor if I decline their gesture. Even If I am to do that, I must use the idea to keep off and act in such a way to achieve the physical distance stringent (Male-40-Ibadan-7).*

A female participant cleared the air:

*Physical distance? That one cannot work here in Nigeria. I don't think it can work; we are just deceiving ourselves. At times if you try to keep your distance from someone where you are standing, they will come and touch you right there and even hold you (Female-54-Lagos-5).*

## **Discussion**

The period of lockdown was a hard time experience for business people in Nigeria. Some were able to cope with the period because of their social position. In a study conducted in France, social position and household affordances were identified as factors that help households and business people to cope with the Covid-19 lockdown order [18]. This is similar to our findings. Some participants noted that the lockdown affected their business because it was not well managed. Another study also affirmed that when the crisis is not well managed, it might have dire, irreversible consequences for firms and businesses [19]. Our study did not find any gender

differentiation, unlike other studies that noted that there was evidence of gender differentiation in the degree to which Nigerians supported the government's actions against Covid-19 and subsequent compliance with lockdown directives [9].

In our study, we find out that many businesses were affected. This is like the experience in many West African countries, across all ages and gender, where businesses were negatively affected by Covid-19 and the lockdown policies [8]. In other similar studies, most of the respondents claimed that the current Covid-19 crisis was not well prepared for business owners. This also threatens food security in the region and aligns with the prediction of food insecurity as a result of Covid-19 [8, 20, 21]. Our study also validated a quantitative assertion that the Covid-19 pandemic has constrained economic activities in Nigeria [11]. As observed in another study carried out in Nigeria, the enforcement of Lockdown during Covid 19 by police was poorly managed, as police were found involved in illegalities in the form of extortion, immoderate use of force, and violence [13]. This is also consistent with our findings as one participant noted that *they are just shouting lockdown, people are still coming and going, it is just a bit more expensive, you have to bribe police on the road.*

In our study areas, participants find it extremely difficult to comply with the physical distance policies. Another study affirmed that situations such as social/physical distancing and quarantining were related to depression in women during the Covid-19 Pandemic [22]. In comparison, other studies reported an increase in the prevalence of depression during the Covid-19 pandemic in the general population [23]. Adherence to social distance in the UK reflects variations from higher levels of compliance during lockdown to a decline towards the period of relaxation [24-26]. Our study did confirm that decline in Nigeria was the result of occupational strain on our

participants. Although, researchers from different countries have shown that the most efficient strategy that has reduced the morbidity and mortality of Covid-19 in the general population has been the implementation of and compliance with some personal hygiene measures, such as hand washing, wearing masks, staying at home, and maintaining social distance [27-30]. Although our participants show some level of compliance at the beginning, they lack consistency in the face of economic challenges.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the Covid-19 burden in Nigeria is lesser than both the burden of other infectious diseases and the Covid-19 burden in other continents. Governments' lockdown order coupled with the lack of government support affected cash flow, household survival, and business operations in the study area. It was observed that there was inadequate preparation

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from both business owners and the government before the lockdown exercise; this took a strong toll on the people. While enforcement of lockdown during Covid 19 by police was also poorly managed because of corruption and the need to survive. There were remarkable difficulties for the participants to comply with some of the Covid-19 protocols. Despite the low level of compliance in Nigeria, the best measure to halt the continuous ravaging waves of Covid-19 remain in compliance with the preventive protocol.

## Conflict of Interest

No Conflict of interest.

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