



Community perceptions about Covid-19 and its socio-economic effects in Rwanda



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ABSTRACT

The covid-19 crisis is global but its socio-economic effects cannot be globally scrutinized. It is deeply local and huge. The research aimed at finding out and assessing community perceptions about Covid-19 and its socio-economic effects in Rwanda. It would inspire policymakers to renovate measures and policies that would help in rehabilitating all sectors in general and more affected groups in particular. From 30 districts of Rwanda, 510 respondents have been sampled through convenience and judgmental techniques. Findings revealed that people misinterpret the pandemic which lowers their level of compliance to Covid-19 preventive measures. Stay home orders were not a fruitful time for families whereby 84% of respondents were victims of domestic and sexual violence. However, with 16%, it was a good time for family cohesion. Isolation and social values frustration, family disorganization and dysfunctional, depression, and anxiety are major social effects of Covid-19. Loss of jobs, decreased salaries, none compliance with preventive measures fines, incapacity to pay bank loans, inability to satisfy family basic needs, government extra investment in medical health care have enormously affected the Rwandan economy. Thus, there is a need of strengthening sensitization of covid-19 spread, preventive measures, short and long-term consequences associated with it. This would shift the population from their wrong perceptions of covid-19 and increase the rate of compliance to established measures so as to free Rwanda from the pandemic and return to a normal life situation.

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Introduction

Covid-19, a pandemic disease, has affected all states worldwide in all sectors. Globally, by 9th March 2021 there were almost 117,972,384 confirmed cases of Covid-19 infection, 93,630,252 millions recovered and 2,616,316 millions of people died. Measures have been put into place to tentatively limit its spread including confinement, quarantine, social distancing, travel restrictions, wearing face masks, stay home orders and washing hands. The pandemic is not yet controlled; no country has acquired the capacity to test all its population, numbers continue to increase and this keeps the population into fear of being contaminated. However, the community behaves as if they do not believe in its existence. Its socio-economic effects cannot be globally well examined. It is deeply local and goes beyond numbers that look not big in Rwanda but its effects is huge. By 9th March, 2021, statistics revealed that in Rwanda there was 19,659 cases of Covid-19, 17,911 recovered and 268 died (WHO, 2021). The annual GDP is expected to decrease from 10.1% in 2019 to 3.5% in 2020 (IMF, 2020). The pandemic is not only killing people but also spreading human sufferings and upending people's lives (Mold, 2020).

When the first affected person was found in Rwanda on 14th March, 2020, different activities suddenly stopped inciting people to purchase more groceries for their stocks to be consumed during lockdown period. The situation victimized people with daily income generating activities, casual workers and a big number of families with low income. More activities were closed except essential services such as shopping groceries, medical health care and banks with a limited number of staffs. Moreover, social cohesion has been abruptly cut off by covid-19 prevention measures. Depressed, the majority of Rwandans are paralyzed by fear, private initiatives

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and projects are closing unexpectedly augmenting the number of unemployment and accumulating the misery of very poor population (Bizoza & Sibomana, 2020). Therefore, the research focuses on analyzing community perceptions and socio-economic effects of covid-19 in Rwandan community. The study aims at:

- i. Finding out respondents' perceptions about Covid-19;
- ii. Investigating the level of rollout and adherence to Covid-19 preventive measures; and
- iii. Analyzing social and economic effects of Covid-19 in Rwandan community.

To more analyze the issue under discussion, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: There is a low level of community adherence to Covid-19 preventive measures due to their perceptions and rejection of its scientific definition.

H2: Covid-19 has depressingly socially and economically affected Rwandan community.

Literature Review

The section presents compliance theory which guided the research. It highlights the roots of compliance or none compliance behaviour which regulates adherence to rules and regulations. Different studies conducted on Covid-19 as well as compliance theory were reviewed. Literature review turns around the theoretical background, conceptual framework and empirical review.

Theoretical background

The section discusses compliance theory used to comprehend community behaviours regarding adherence to covid-19 preventive measures and its complexity.

Compliance theory

Compliance refers to meanings and interpretations of rules and regulations which generate social habits, practices, interactions and communications which different actors adopt in implementation process (Parker & Nielsen, 2017). It intends to assist in discovering motivation behind community behaviors relating to rollout and adherence to Covid-19 preventive measures and its socio-economic implications (Feldman, 2011).

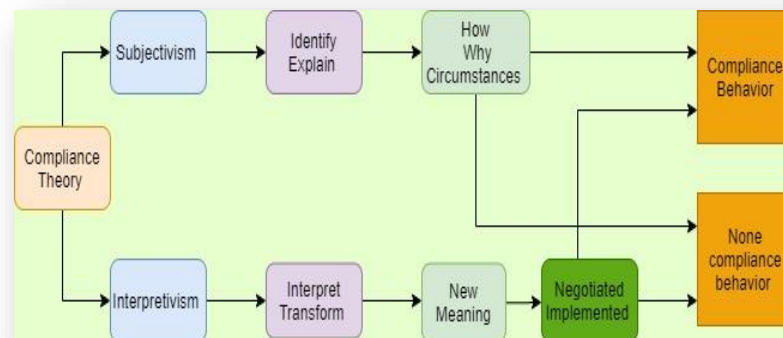


Figure 1: Compliance theory model

Complexity of understanding Covid-19

Human understanding is inspired by past experiences. Covid-19 is a crisis which does not have precedent comparison to refer to for parallelism and effective management (Michie, Van-Stralen, & West, 2011). Its environments do not allow communities to clearly align their behaviours to measures in place as a way of limiting its spread. The rollout and adherence to regulations is facilitated by direct or indirect interest of the population which regulate behavioural compliance (Parker & Nielsen, 2017). Understanding people's responses to public health measures of Covid-19, their attentiveness to engage in compliance is depicted by an acceptance of the danger, its consequences on their lives and the trust of received public information. It is nurtured by economic, social and normative motives (Parker & Nielsen, 2012). When people feel that adherence to Covid-19 preventive measures brings more consequences, they develop an understanding that adherence bears worse effects than being affected. Thus, the pandemic is given less weight and measures are violated (Parker & Nielsen, 2011). The level of community understanding is a motivating element which generates compliance behaviour. The justification of community adherence relies on how they do consider and understand the severity of the pandemic.

Conceptual framework

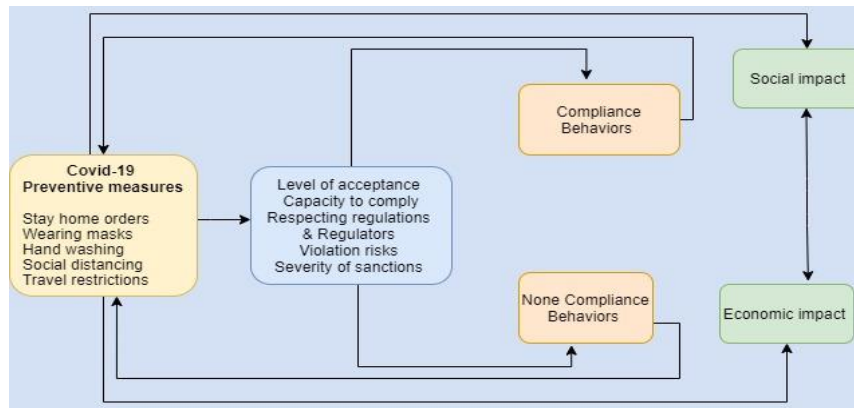


Figure 2: Community level of compliance to Covid-19 preventive measures

Empirical review

For a deep understanding of social and economic effects of covid-19, different studies were reviewed.

Saladino, Algeri & Auriemma (2020) in their article on psychological and social effects of Covid-19: new perspectives of well-being highlighted negative effects of the pandemic on the most exposed group; children, college students and health workers. They observed that the disease exposes them to post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression and other symptoms of distress. Social distancing has affected their interpersonal relationship and their perception of empathy and ability of sharing feelings as people communicate through digital device. Even if it is a way of limiting the spread of Covid-19, it psychologically and socially affects people's life.

Kalaylioglu (2020) analyzed economic and social effects of Covid-19 on women and men: Rapid gender assessment of Covid-19 implications in Turkey. It was found that the pandemic is not only affecting economic capacity of people but also has tremendous social consequences. It has worsened women's situation that are underprivileged in employment market. Dominantly, women are engaged in unpaid domestic work which increased their vulnerability to gender-based violence during confinement.

Bizoza & Sibomana (2020) conducted a study on indicative socio-economic effects of the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak in Eastern Africa: Case of Rwanda. The findings of the study indicated that different levels of the country were affected by Covid-19. Basically, internal trade and SMEs were more affected than agricultural sector which hinder the entire economy of Rwanda.

Chudik et al. (2020) conducted a study on economic consequences of Covid-19: a counterfactual multi-country analysis. Findings indicated that Covid-19 brought long lasting consequences and there is no country which can escape its effects regardless their mitigation strategies. It was found out that the pandemic is posing formidable challenges both socially and economically.

Research and Methodology

The study used a qualitative approach through desk review, questionnaire and interview (Babbie & Mouton, 2010; Neuman, 2011). It was conducted in all provinces of Rwanda and Kigali city. Respondents were selected from 30 districts considering 17 in each. Convenience and judgmental sampling were used to select 510 respondents, among them 278 are females and 232 are males. Data was collected from 450 respondents through questionnaires and 60 were interviewed (Kitchin & Tate, 2013; Saunders et al., 2019). In data analysis, mixed approach was used since data included both qualitative and quantitative.

Findings

The section presents findings as per research objectives namely finding out respondents' perceptions about Covid-19, level of rollout and adherence to Covid-19 preventive measures as well as analyzing social and economic effects of Covid-19 in Rwandan community.

Respondents' perceptions about Covid-19

Scientists define Covid-19 as a pandemic, an infectious disease caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Corona Virus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) that has alarming levels of spread and severity. Putting in place protective measures to limit its spread was taken by government of Rwanda as a priority. Each state has a responsibility to rise up the population awareness to comply with protective measures (WHO, 2020; Amiri & Akram, 2020). However, resistance of adherence to preventive measures has been observed within Rwandan community.

The reason behind community resistance to comply with protective measures of Covid-19 is based on community perceptions of the pandemic that differs from scientific and political perspectives. Their misperception fed disrespect of measures such as lockdown, face masks, social distancing, travel restrictions, stay home orders, etc. Covid-19 is perceived as a disease which affects rich, white and old people. Within this narrow and wrong community definition, the roll out and adherence is not taught off. Even though in

China, USA and Italy, 80% of those who died of Covid-19 were over the age of 60, young people need to understand that they have to protect themselves since they are included in 20% of death under the above-mentioned age (Human Rights Watch Report, 2020; CDC, 2020). One of the outcomes of such consideration is that it makes the population careless regarding the respect of Covid-19 preventive measures. This trend has been observed during interviews whereby inconsistencies in complying have been highlighted. Respondents (48,4%) stated that for poor families, it is difficult to always dispose with masks, soap, water and hand sanitizer for frequently cleaning their hands. Only wealthy families are able to comply with those measures. On the other hand, social distancing can be easily respected by everyone (rich or poor). Moreover, respondents highlighted that non-compliance to Covid-19 preventive measures is justified by the fact that very poor people are fearless because of being used to bad living conditions. They justify their behaviour as being rooted in their living conditions. One of respondents asserted that:

A village of poor people where there is a problem of proper accommodation with a big number of family members gathered on a small space and poor sanitation tools, we are disparate about our living conditions and thus become fearless.

They develop irresponsible behaviour towards health dangers as they are already in treacherous situation. The majority of respondents (51,6%) go beyond in negating the existence of Covid-19 by stating that: If it does exist, poor people would have died in one week because of very poor sanitary conditions they are living in without possibility of applying protective measures. It is a political pandemic rather than a community disease. With such misconception, the community is not consciously prepared to comply with measures as they may think Covid-19 is cooked, imaginary; it is not real, they do not fear it. This popular definition has generated irresponsible behaviours as an expression of bias about the rationale of the pandemic and measures being reinforced. People's behaviour results from their beliefs and understandings which in turn generates a new meaning. Community interpretation constructs an image of reality from people's perspective which inform their compliance or none compliance behaviours (Breckenridge, et al., 2012; Howell, 2013).

Level of community rollout and adherence to COVID-19 preventive measures

During lockdown period, the government of Rwanda has put into place preventive measures to limit the spread of Covid-19 and communicated through various channels. It is for the benefit of the population to comply otherwise violators were fined as a reinforcement to roll out and adherence. People who violated preventive measures of Covid-19 are many as indicated in table 1.

Table 1: Statistical presentation of people who violated Covid-19 measures

Month	Vehicles	Motorcycles	Bicycles	Pedestrians	Arrested in bars
May	3,646	908	2,228	86,536	3,907
June	2,842	1,273	2,368	70,487	4,919
July	4,350	1,181	1,267	64,004	5,901
August	3,365	1,764	1,566	113,238	4,091
September	3,997	1,685	1,862	145,112	4,241
October	2,787	1,885	995	77,873	4,074
Total	20,987	8,696	10,286	557,250	27,133

Statistics indicate that many people do not adhere to preventive measures. Table 1 (RNP statistics, 2020) presents statistics of violators from May to October, 2020. There are people who have shown resistance to rollout and adherence and were fined even though they justify their behaviors differently. The total number of violators account

for 624,352 including people with vehicles, motorcycles, bicycles, pedestrians and people arrested in bars. Among all categories of violators, a big number is found in the category of pedestrians with 89,2%, arrested in bars 4,3%, vehicles 3,4%, bicycles 1,7% and motorcycles 1,4%. This shows that people do not understand the huge consequences of violating measures which intend to fight against the spread of Covid-19. Their violation is much linked to their perceptions regarding the pandemic. A big number of people 17, 656 vehicles, 6, 864 motorcycles were fined due to none compliance to Covid-19 preventive measures which amplified individual and family financial crisis (RNP Report from May to October, 2020).

Effects of Covid-19

Covid-19 presents enormous consequences but the present research focuses on both social and economic effects in Rwandan community. Attached to its cultural background which places social interactions at the center, preventive measures were not welcomed. In addition, Covid-19 has handicapped different income generating activities which affected its economic power. The following sections present how covid-19 has affected Rwandan community both socially and economically.

Social effects of Covid-19

Even though lockdown would be time to enhance family members' interactions, the pandemic has shifted them from relationships to isolations, calmness to fear. Family discussions were all about Covid-19 news: increasing number of affected persons, deaths, recovered, more affected countries, different viewpoints on the definitions of the pandemic, its treatments, causes and consequences.

Stay home orders: Togetherness, impasse and fear

A big number of respondents (84%) expressed their worries about the lockdown period. The family agenda discussion nurtured depression, anxiety that paralyzed their time for family plans; people were killing time on social media. Respondents asserted that lockdown orders brought uncertainties and miserable time in their families.

Terrified and depressed by uncontrollable disease, my home was considered as a hell when I received a suspension letter. As the only source of income, my wife was not working and I had a big family to nourish and a bank loan. My room became my entire world. Since then, I lost my authority as head of family. Anxious, it once came in my mind to commit suicide when I felt incapable to feed my family and had no hope when this dreadful situation would end.

Everything was uncertain; each family member was affected and terrified by the pandemic news. Social and emotional insecurity created by the environment of Covid-19 did not release people to look and plan ahead. The crisis was too heavy within families that there was no emotional and social support. Depression generates a self-directed violence that destroys people's life. Considerable number of respondents has been victims of anxiety with various severities. From public to private places, threatening uncontrollable disease with countless contradictions reported by social media abstracted the hope of many people. Damage may not be visible but where depression and life deterioration persist, health is extremely compromised (Kansiime et al, 2021). Among 84% of respondents, a significant number (33.5%) recognize the use of too much alcohol and drugs than ever before as a wrong way of responding to painful environment created by Covid-19. This pushed them to violate preventive measures more than once fearlessly. Life was viewed as meaningless to value any rules and regulations and being punished did not stop them to repeat the wrongdoing.

Only 16% of respondents refer to this period as beneficial to their families even if it had also challenges. Managing the stress, fear and impasse of stay home orders increased their family relationship. One of respondents expressed that:

It was a lovely time to be together with my wife and children. We had time to revisit our family plan and filled the gap of not being closer to children because of work. The only challenge I had was not having the capacity to offer 3 meals per day as usual. We decided to have one meal per day and this spoiled our good time. Children were stressed; it was unthinkable but it happened.

Domestic and sexual violence

Globally, gender-based violence has dreadful increment of 20% during the period of lockdown (Kalaylioglu, 2020). Violence is a major factor hindering social and economic welfare within families (Cousins, 2019). Though cases have been observed before covid-19, the pandemic has worsened the situation by binding conflicting family members together and bears long lasting consequences (Kansiime et al, 2021). Within 84% of respondents that had social and emotional crisis during lockdown, domestic violence took place either as a continuation of a misunderstanding which started before the crisis (73.5%) or resulted from depressing environment of Covid-19 (26.5%). Exchanging heavy words, attitude, neglecting the presence of the other, vacating to their respective responsibilities and fighting characterized the lockdown period. Sharing her experience, she said: *Hiding conflict and torture I endured before was not possible, my children discovered it; we were not able to hide it anymore. He left me with four children during lockdown.*

Covid-19 has increased sexual violence within and out of families (Nkurunziza, 2020). Among 278 females sampled, 63% were sexually abused. Sexual harassment including demanding sex in return for favours, sexual assault and abuse, forced cohabitation, denial of the right to have protected sex and sexual exploitation are types of sexual violence faced during the period of staying home. During interview, she expressed that:

My boss kept me in fear of losing my job if I do not accept to sleep with him. I was among few staff selected to stay working during Covid-19 and I finally accepted. I leave with that heavy and wounding memory. I feel guilty with a self-accusation as if it happened today. The reason behind that foolish decision I made cannot help me feel safe; I am unsecured and have lost confidence.

Statistics reveal that during Covid-19 when a small percentage of staff at work was required, employment rate of women was higher than men (NISR, 2020). Those who survived and are still employed are more vulnerable to sexual violence if their bosses are not royal. Paralyzed by fear of the situation of family misery which Covid-19 has created, a big number of females are sexually exploited with all its consequences to their families (Bazubagira & Umumararungu, 2021). Even if women are a big number of victims of sexual abuse, few cases (3%) out of 232 sampled males also experienced sexual violence. Forced to intimate relations, they are under shock of what happened. Expressing his deep sorrow in an interview, he expressed that:

As a driver, the lockdown mixed up my plan and life. Not able to continue paying house rent, I went to live with my uncle. I was manipulated and forced to sleep with a 19 years old house girl who was 2 months pregnant. My uncle impregnated her and wanted someone to marry the girl to free him with that pregnancy. I was given much alcohol to the extent of losing control. Manipulated, I slept with the pregnant lady. Some days later, my uncle and the girl started shouting at me and I decided to marry her in June, 2020. Two months later, I realized that she had a pregnancy which was not mine and decided to leave her alone. I am traumatized and confused trying to find my way out.

Another alarming situation of sexual violence during the pandemic is the case of early pregnancies. Within 24 teens part of respondents, 54% have been sexually abused within or out of their homes. Fragilized, they are depressed and their families are not supportive. Unprotected sex has exposed them not only to early pregnancies (36.5%) but also to sexual transmitted diseases. It was revealed by 12.5% that sexual violence was combined with physical tortures.

Early pregnancies are not only a burden to adolescents but also to their families. Pregnant girls have lost their hope to resume schools once they will be having babies which incites their trial for abortion. Even if statistic of abused teens is not yet known, there is some pieces of it that shows the severity of the situation during lockdown. The identified number of teenagers sexually abused are estimated

to 6220 from Nyagatare, Kirehe, Gatsibo, Bugesera, Gasabo, Rwamagana, Muhanga and Ngoma to list few. The given number which looks huge does not present the total number in the whole country. However, the number of impregnated teenagers from only 5 Districts is 550, 444, 300, 200, 134 in Bugesera, Gasabo, Rwamagana, Muhanga and Ngoma respectively. In Gasabo District, from 1,064 who were sexually abused, 444 which represent 41.7% were impregnated (Nkurunziza, 2020).

Covid-19 has amplified early pregnancies which augmented family vulnerability. Consequences of sexual violence are devastating and costly. Not able to support their children with psychological, social, emotional and economic, most of teen mums become sex workers, a decision that intensifies their misery that has immediate and long-lasting consequences on their lives, children, families and national level at large. Rights of children born from sexual violence are violated. They face the problem of identity crisis which is a major push factor of street children and a burden to the community. Sexual violence nourishes family conflict, unplanned birth and unstable behaviors which is a problem to national security. Teen mums and their children instead of contributing to social and economic development, they become a burden to their families and government (Bazubagira & Umumarungu, 2020).

Family disorganization and dysfunction during lockdown

Lockdown separated family members as it started suddenly when people were in different areas either in the country or abroad and could not get a way back home. Respondents (49%) experienced this abrupt situation nourished by fear and confusion. This created a conflicting situation of social and financial irresponsibility. Expressing his worry to send money to his wife when he was not home, he said:

I could not send money to my family because I was not secured about how long it would take to resume work. Getting food in rural areas is easier than in town where I was locked in. This generated a suspicious environment between my wife and I.

Family members were depressed of not being with their partners, children, relatives and friends. A husband of family who gave birth during lockdown separation expressed that:

My wife gave birth when I was locked in Kigali. It was painful and my conscious still has a self-accusation; it is horrible to remember. I was locked in Kigali doing nothing and my wife was alone while she needed assistance. Neighbors could not assist her since they were constrained by lockdown measures.

Families whose relatives were into different places in Rwanda or out faced a critical situation full of fear and depression to think about their coming back home, passing through quarantine of 14 days, being tested, not meeting them during this period while they needed emotional family support. *It is a mind-bending disease that has made our usual signals of affection and compassion the most dangerous thing to the loved people*, expressed a respondent.

It was a challenge when after the lockdown period, a four years old child visited his grandmother and instead of hugging her, he asked: 'grand ma, do you have corona?' It is a chocking situation; young children have been instinctively terrified by the pandemic. How to deal with this traumatic situation that affect young generation? The answer is not certain. It is painful also to hear pupils, students complaining about the suspension of their school activities because of corona virus and they were not even allowed to use their time as they want. Stay home killed their ambition to play and visit friends.

None-compliance behaviors

Preventive measures reinforced by the Government of Rwanda (GoR) to limit the spread of Covid-19 were established and the population was required to respect them. However, Rwanda National Police (RNP) reported 624, 352 people who violated established measures without any genuine reason (RNP report, 2020). What can be the motive behind this big number of violators? People did not understand how this can protect them from Covid-19 expressed 78% of respondents. They did not consider the pandemic aggressive to them and they had other definitions like the pandemic kills white, rich, old and people living in town. It has been labeled as neither an African disease nor killing poor people. Living in too small, crowded and crammed houses, it is hard to respect the defined preventive measures. *The adherence to preventive measures is not for people like me. I do not have enough space, means and materials. Poverty and hunger are more aggressive to my family than Covid-19.* Though the GoR sensitized and reinforced implementation of preventive measures, the community understanding and definition of covid-19 pushes them to violate.

There has been much contradiction about Covid-19 on social media that propagated contrast and disregard of public information about it. Social media has attracted the attention of people than information from Ministry of Health and this has been a barrier to the creation of responsive behaviors. It created a vacuum in making decision relating to seriousness of applying preventive measures. People tend to be poor at assessing risks and chances to comply with measures even if they have wrong motives of doing so. *I do not know any affected people; they are invisible, not noticeable and intangible in our community reason why vigilance is not an issue* stated a respondent. Portrayed as an unreal and political pandemic, there is a mistrust of public information. Even though people resist complying, Rwandan security officers imposed preventive measures implementation with fines to 24,526 people who did not respect regulations and were caught red handed (RNP report, 2020). *It is a panicking situation to be caught red handed and spending the whole night at a stadium*, expressed a respondent who was caught twice. There is a fear of being punished than being contaminated.

Isolation and frustration of social values

Social distancing, do not shake hands, do not hug each other, frequently wash hands with clean water and soap, wear masks when out, minimize travel hours are measures taken to fight the spread of Covid-19. Due to Rwandan culture, these measures were not welcomed by the population as they are against their social life, practices and values. *It is unlikely to not be compassionate with a relative or a friend going through mourning time, burial ceremony, celebrating an important event assuming that you are fighting the spread of corona we have never seen in our community.* People who have not seen any family member or friend affected by Covid-19 consider it as inexistent disease. She went on saying that *physical, social and psychological loneliness traumatize people than corona.* A considerable number of respondents (54%) interpret preventive measures as traumatizing, creating social isolation and abandonment of people in need of support. Looking at the goodness of cultural sociability, the bond of hugging each other, shaking hands, emotional communication behind those none verbal messages, imposed compliance is interpreted as a frustration in the community.

Economic effects of Covid-19

The pandemic has economically affected both public and private sectors but largely private sector dominated by informal businesses. The total number of people involved in most affected businesses is 2,931,494 employees in informal sector (NISR, 2019). They are most unsecured workers without any saving to predict uncertainties and with low salary that expose them to risk of extreme poverty (Rob et al., 2020). Rwandan economy is basically dominated by informal sector which represents 89.5 % of the total number of employments within which 55.3% are males (NISR, 2019). The same report indicates that Rwanda informal economy is mainly constituted by youth and females whereby 3/4 are in informal economy that was mostly affected by Covid-19. The lockdown has unexpectedly closed industries increasing the fragility of people who invested in this sector and pushing them to extreme poverty (NISR, 2020; WHO, 2020; World Bank, 2020). Covid-19 has enlarged unemployment rate from 13, 1% in February, 2020 to 22.1% in May, 2020. Within a period of 4 months, unemployment rate increment was 9% (NISR, 2020). In many private institutions, due to Covid-19, employment contracts were abruptly terminated and in others salaries were reduced to 30%. It worsened employees' financial situation due to the incapacity to pay bank loans, rent and handicapped small businesses which supplemented their salaries. From 510 respondents, 28% faced the challenge of employment contracts suspension and 16% of them have bank loans. During an interview, one of respondents stated that:

I worked with an agency involved in tourism. On 22nd all activities were suspended and the next day, I received a notice from Human Resource that my contract was suspended till further notice. It was a chock and traumatizing information because in January, 2020 I bought a house with a bank loan. I could not sleep any more. I am waiting for the bank to sell my house. I do not see the way out of this family critical situation.

The pandemic has economically affected a big number of people due to unexpected closure of many income generating activities. Living on monthly salary basis and without any other financial source of income or support, families were more affected. It was a very critical time to get transport and if available it was very expensive. A respondent voiced that:

Working in a super market, we had a meeting with the boss explaining the situation that brought a lot of changes. My salary was reduced to half and a big portion of it was used for transport. I accepted to continue working as I feared losing my job after the pandemic when things would come at normal life. Otherwise, the wage was not sufficient to support family needs.

The time of lockdown has closed borders for neighboring countries. Small businesses have been extremely affected. Expressing how Covid-19 economically affected her family, she asserted that:

Since 2007, I invested in DRC in agriculture due to the fact that it still has fertile soil. I had a big plantation of maize. When borders were closed, I was in Rwanda and could not move to DRC and it was a harvest season. Friends tried to assist me and I got almost half of what I was supposed to gain as I could not supervise them.

The population from districts bordering neighboring countries find themselves in a situation where they could not cross either for harvesting their crops, buying food or doing other businesses which augmented their misery. It is estimated that 4,600 citizens cross every day Rusizi II and Bukavu borders and 50,000 citizens cross Rubavu and Goma to look for services or goods (Fassiotti & Kalisa, 2019; Bedford, 2019). People were not able to benefit from this exchange. The economic effects of 54, 600 people estimated could not continue to do their cross-border trading which devastated their economy. This has long lasting effects on national economy in general and family economy in particular. It is not an isolated situation of Rubavu and Rusizi II; all bordering districts faced the same. The important financial source of income has got many challenges due to Covid-19 and enlarged the problem of households that survived on daily income in cross-borders trading. A cross border driver expressed:

During Covid-19, the trajectory that was supposed to take 3 days was doubled; testing, waiting for results took almost a week. I did not gain anything during this period and the situation victimized my family. The important portion of my salary was used to respond to Covid-19 preventive measures. Getting basic needs, treatment and medicine was very hard even though we have a medical insurance. My family was terrified by financial crisis and being contaminated.

Businesses related to gatherings such as hotels, wedding materials and clothes were enormously affected by Covid-19 since gatherings were prohibited. People who invested in such activities were economically more affected even though the pandemic did not leave behind any sector. A respondent expressed his shocking experience of losing almost 73, 4 millions. He asserted that:

The pandemic has enormously affected my business. I had containers from China that brought new wedding fashion materials. They reached Kigali when they were no more needs. It took almost 4 months to get them and due to suspension of gathering and wedding ceremonies, I could not get customers to get a return on what I invested.

The pandemic has economically affected all 510 sampled people but the severity of its effects varies according to social and economic environment of each family. Many people lost their jobs, businesses were handicapped which decreased the economy at all levels. Covid-19 has enormously created a deep economic gap which will take time to be filled in.

Not only families were economically affected but also the government faced many economic challenges associated with the crisis. As employment rate was reduced, it resulted in taxes reduction while the government was involved in many extra financial activities. They include among others buying testing tools, creation of isolation and treatment centers which necessitates appropriate equipment, cost of quarantine travelers; they involved more unplanned financial burden to the government. This is a huge budget that could be used for development activities. In addition to extra budget, cross-borders trading were important sources of government income and its closure resulted in national economy decrease. For example, in 2015, cross borders trade contributed to \$ 108.3 million to Rwanda and DRC national economies (Fassiotti&Kalisa, 2019).

Conclusions

The study focused on assessing community perceptions about covid-19 and its socio-economic effects in Rwandan community. Perceived by some of respondents as being a none existing disease, a pandemic of white and rich people which bears political hidden issues, this has influenced their adherence to preventive measures. Even though there is much bias in covid-19 definition, it has affected people both socially and economically. Level of community adherence to Covid-19 preventive measures is still low due to community perceptions and rejection of its scientific definition. Furthermore, covid-19 has enormously affected Rwandan community both socially and economically.

It has diverted people from social values and norms which characterized Rwandan community life. Social gathering and ceremonies provide opportunity to interact and communicate for emotional and psychological support. It has been very hard to comply with preventive measures that thwart them. The community's understanding is that it is unreasonable and unacceptable to not attend burial or any other event in the name of covid-19 avoidance. Lockdown worsened the existing situation of domestic violence as family members were locked in together for a long period. Due to unexpected closure of many activities and reduction of working staff, the economy at individual and government levels was pretentious.

Educating the community about public health focusing on covid-19, its spread and preventive measures would help to move the population from misconception regarding the pandemic. Raising community awareness about it would increase community compliance. It is a useful approach to free Rwanda from the pandemic and return to normal life.

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