

**GENDER AND STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS COVID-19  
PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES IN UNIVERSITY OF CALABAR,  
CROSS RIVER STATE,  
NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

The study examined the influence of gender and students' attitudes towards COVID-19 precautionary measures at the University of Calabar, Calabar, Cross River State of Nigeria. The study used a descriptive survey design. One research question and one hypothesis were formulated for the study. The population of the study comprised 261 final-year students in the Arts Education Department, University of Calabar in the 2019/2020 academic session. One hundred (100) students were randomly chosen as the study's sample. The students' Gender and Attitude Towards COVID-19 Precautionary Measures Questionnaire (SGATCPMQ) was the instrument used to collect the data. For data analysis, the t-test, mean, and standard deviation were utilized. The study's conclusions showed that gender has a big impact on how students feel about COVID-19 safety precautions. In line with the study's findings, it was suggested, that government, non-governmental organizations, and other critical stakeholders should support awareness campaigns for the precautions needed to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the school system and by extension, the larger society.

**Keywords: Gender, Attitude, COVID-19, Preventive Measures.**

### **Introduction**

A developing respiratory illness called Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is brought on by a new coronavirus.; the dangerous type of coronavirus known as the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS COV-2). This outbreak was earlier reported by the World Health Organization (WHO) on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December, 2019 in Wuhan City China. However, the ailment is highly infectious, and her main clinical symptoms include fatigue, fever, myalgia, dry cough, and dyspnoea (Zhong, Luo, Li, Liu, Li & Li, 2020). The researchers acknowledged that intimate contact with infected people, contaminated surfaces, and droplets from coughs and sneezes might all result in the virus being contracted through the eyes, nose, and mouth. It takes between one to fourteen days for incubation. The symptoms which also include shortness of breath can be diagnosed through testing in a laboratory. According to a WHO report, this could cause serious respiratory issues or even death when contracted, especially in elderly people who already have chronic health issues. While some virus carriers exhibit no symptoms, others may just show a slight illness and quickly bounce back (Sauer, 2020).

As reported by WHO, the infection does not have an immediate treatment. Hence, a universal pandemic, with significant mortality and morbidity. As of March 2021, there were about 117 million confirmed cases, 66.3 million recoveries, and 2.6 million deaths worldwide (WHO, 2021). In Nigeria, a total number of 158, 906 cases have been confirmed, 138, 502 recoveries and 1, 982 deaths. In Cross River State, a total of 334 cases have been confirmed with 274 recoveries and 17 deaths by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) in 2021 (NCDC, 2021). Owing to the pandemic, nations are taking different measures to mitigate its spread, including restrictions on people's movement, staying at home, and closing schools and different social services (Burke, 2020; Bassey & Owan, 2020; Zettler, Schild, Lillehot&Böhm, 2020). In line with the WHO declaration, Nigeria has facilitated the implementation of preventive measures to halt the spread of the pandemic. These include closing schools, staying at home, keeping social distance, physical distance, and routine washing of hands in public places like banks, markets, and

churches/mosques (Tadesse, Melese & Eshetie, 2020). In the same vein, the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers and nose masks has also been emphasized.

These preventive measures put in place seem not to be effective as the spread of the virus keeps increasing. This could be attributed to the attitudes exhibited by some people, especially during the post-COVID-19 lockdown era. Among university students, there seems to be a very high rate of non-compliance to the precautionary measures of COVID-19 (Aslam, Sonkar & Owan, 2021). In the University of Calabar, specifically, many students do not adhere to the laid-down protocols of Covid-19. They tend to neglect the compulsory use of nose masks and only seem to do so when they get to security posts or entrance points. Also, some students fail to observe the regular handwashing routine with running water from taps or alcohol-based hand sanitizers even when these things are being provided at strategic locations by the university.

Against the university's policy and surveillance teams, some students are still being seen walking in clusters and in close range which is less than the recommended 2 metres apart. In the classrooms, especially during examinations, some students also tend to sit closer to their classmates in the hall, against the efforts of staff and invigilators. These observed attitudes by students are unacceptable and do not give an impression of strict compliance to COVID-19 established protocols. This has some implications for the readiness of the university in curbing the dispersion of the virus. This study is focused on examining the influence of students' gender and attitudes towards COVID-19 precautionary measures at the University of Calabar, Calabar during the post-COVID-19 lockdown era.

Gender simply refers to the constructed characteristics of women, men, girls, and boys that are social in nature. These include the norms, behaviours, and roles associated with being either male or female as well as the relationships among them. Gender was considered in the study to find out if male students behaved differently from their female counterparts regarding their attitudes toward COVID-

19 precautionary measures and to what extent. The aim is to see which of the genders demonstrates favourable attitudes more than the other.

The academic level of students is defined as the progress students have made in completing required credit units in the university. The academic level is measured using the number of years students have spent in the university. In this study, students' academic level ranges from years 1-4. Final year students were considered appropriate for the study because they are the exit class and tend to have a good understanding of the consequences of not keeping to COVID-19 preventive measures.

### **Statement of the problem**

The SARS-CoV-2 virus caused a lot of stir in almost every country of the world ever since the number one universal health organization, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared it as a pandemic in the year 2020. The experiences among people and nations at the peak of the pandemic were so devastating and traumatizing. During the lockdown, many individuals and families went hungry and became bored while staying at home. There came the new normal where people had to adhere strictly to the established Covid-19 preventive measures that could help to mitigate the spread of the virus. However, while these rules had been established and seemed to be widely adopted by many nations, in 2021, at the resumption of academic activities in schools, students in tertiary institutions who should be advocates of the new normal were observed to be more inclined to contravening the established precautionary measures put in place by the university management which include body sanitizers mounted at entry points, handwashing points mounted at strategic locations within the school premises including classrooms, emphasis on constant wearing of nose-mask and keeping social distance etc. These preventive measures were observed to be grossly violated by students, except when confronted by security agents of the institution or mandated at entry points by any other staff of the institution. This poor attitude of students towards COVID-19 precautionary measures could be linked to a lack of awareness, poor knowledge of the disease, or outright refusal to adhere to the preventive

measures put in place. In light of the foregoing, this study seeks to examine the influence of gender on students' attitudes toward COVID-19 precautionary measures at the University of Calabar. If it does, to what extent?

### **Theoretical framework**

This work is anchored on self-perception theory by Daryl Bem. The theory was developed by a psychologist in 1967. According to the hypothesis, people form their attitudes (in the absence of prior experience) by analyzing their behavior to determine the attitudes that must have contributed to it. The theory goes contrary to popular knowledge, which upholds that attitudes drive behaviour. The ideology also upholds that individuals can create attitudes independently of their internal states. The implication of the theory to the present study is that the attitude of students towards COVID-19 precautionary measures may be due to their understanding of the environment and the evidence surrounding them.

### **Literature review**

Gender has also been linked to the Covid-19 prevention mechanisms, with males being less likely than women to wash their hands, put on a nose mask, or use measures of keeping social distance (Griffith, Sharma, Holiday, Enyia, Valliere, Semlow, Stewart & Blumenthal, 2020). This could be linked to men's proclivity to play down the pandemic's seriousness (McCarthy, 2020). In this vein, Ningsih, Eka, and Danal (2021) used a quantitative descriptive method with a cross-sectional approach to investigate certain variables that predict adolescent adherence to the covid-19 protocols. The participants in the study were 246 junior high and senior high school students who were specifically selected to meet the eligibility criteria by being between the ages of 13 and 18. The data were evaluated using the chi-square test and binary logistic regression. The importance of personal and social responsibility, as well as gender, were found to have a direct link with adolescent conformity behaviours in preventing the spread of Covid-19. Male teens like to leave without a mask and to move away from women without a mask. The authors proposed that the government and the COVID-19 task force should discuss gender

and the importance of the personal and social roles of youth to enhance teenage conformity to avoid the spread of the virus.

The understanding of students of tertiary institutions about the COVID-19 disease and its Precautionary Measures was evaluated by Saeed, Safaan, Samia, and El-Nagar (2022). The purpose of the survey was to gauge university students' awareness of the COVID-19 pandemic and the safety precautions that have been taken. A descriptive research design was considered appropriate and used to achieve the purpose of the study. 280 university students were sampled for the study and they were between the ages of 18- 22, drawn from the Faculty of Commerce and Faculty of Law in Shebin Elkom City, Menoufia University. A properly structured research questionnaire which has socio-demographic attributes and knowledge of undergraduate students on the COVID-19 disease was used for data collection. The findings revealed that more than eight in ten college students (82.2%) had inadequate awareness of COVID-19, while 16.4% of them had a fair knowledge and 1.4% had adequate knowledge. However, many of the respondents in the study were not aware of all the COVID-19 prevention strategies, including hand-washing (61.8%), covering their mouths and noses with an elbow or tissue when they cough or sneeze (66.1%), always wearing a mask in crowded areas (67.1%), and keeping a distance of at least up to one meter from anyone (66.3%). According to the study's findings, the majority of pupils are unaware of the COVID-19 epidemic and its safety measures. The researchers suggested raising students' awareness of COVID-19 and its preventive actions.

In a related study, Bolarinwa, Olagunju, Babalola, and Saeed (2020) looked at social demographic factors that influence compliance with advice in addition to the psychological effects of the COVID-19 lockdown among various users of social media networks. The study used a cross-sectional survey to collect the necessary data from possible respondents via social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, and Google's online questionnaire. during April 1 and April 31, 2020, Nigerian users of social media were given a link to the poll, as well as during those dates, 1,131 people responded to it. At a 5% level of

significance, chi-square statistical analysis was employed to demonstrate the link between the explanatory variable and the outcome variables in the study. Results for gender revealed that although men were more likely to comply with COVID-19 recommendations (99.2%), the difference from women (98.2%) was not statistically significant. As a result, it was determined that gender is not a reliable indicator of adherence to Covid-19 safety precautions.

The study of Al-Dossary, Alamri, Al-Hosis, Aljeldah, and Aljohan (2020) revealed amongst others that there were significant differences in participants' responses about their perception of Covid-19. The post-hoc analysis revealed that nurses with a diploma or first degree performed much better than those with a master's degree. The fact, that nurses with first degrees only, had better safety initiatives and perception of COVID-19 compared to other nurses with different educational backgrounds did not surprise the authors as it should. This was predicted because a bachelor's degree is typically the bare minimum needed to serve as a staff nurse on the nursing staff.

However, the knowledge, attitude, and perspective of the Nigerian Military populace concerning the outbreak of COVID-19 were evaluated by Ogbeje, Bisji, Umar, Jallo, Ezeh, and James (2020). 216 data points were gathered from the Nigerian Army armed forces like the Nigerian Air Force, and Nigerian Navy via a web-based cross-sectional survey. Results indicate that there was no significant relationship between awareness of COVID-19 and demographic characteristics such as age, gender, military branch, religion, level of education, and marital status. The findings also revealed that there is no statistically significant relationship between respondents' demographic characteristics and how COVID-19 was perceived. This indicates that there was no discernible difference in the perception based on the demographic characteristics.

### **Objective of the study**

The focus of the study was to investigate the influence of gender on students' attitudes towards COVID-19 precautionary measures at the University of

Calabar, Calabar, Cross River State of Nigeria. Specifically, the study aimed at finding out:

- i) The influence of students' gender on their attitude towards COVID-19 precautionary measures.

**Research question**

- i) What influence has students' gender had on their attitude towards Covid-19 precautionary measures?

**Research hypothesis**

- i) Students' gender has no significant influence on their attitude towards Covid-19 precautionary measures.

**Methodology**

The research design considered suitable and adopted was descriptive survey research. The study was conducted at the University of Calabar, Calabar, in Cross River State of Nigeria. The university is situated at Etta Agbor in Calabar Municipality Local Government Area. The population of the study comprised all final-year students in the 2019/2020 academic session in the Arts Education Department (consisting of Education/English, Education/French, Education/History, and Education/Religion) in the Faculty of Arts and Social Science Education. The population distribution is as shown in TABLE 1.

TABLE 1

SN	Unit	Population
1	Education/English	93
2	Education/French	11
3	Education/History	81
4	Education/Religion	66
	Total	251

Source: Arts Education Department, University of Calabar, Calabar.



From the population, as shown in Table 1, a sample of 100 students was randomly selected from the four units for the study. A well-structured and validated questionnaire titled: Students' Gender and Attitude Towards Covid-19 Precautionary Measures Questionnaire (SGATCPMQ). Mean, standard deviation and t-tests were used for data analysis.

### Presentation of results

Answer to research question

Research question: What influence has students' gender had on their attitude towards Covid-19 precautionary measures?

As a process to answering the research question, the mean rating of each questionnaire item was determined which gives 2.5. A mean score of 2.5 and above signifies agreement while a mean score of less than 2.5 signifies disagreement.

**Table 1**

Showing the items on students' attitudes toward COVID-19 precautionary measures

SN	ITEMS/CODE	SA 4pts	A 3pts	D 2pts	SD 1pt	Mean	Remark
1	I always put on a facemask whenever I am in crowded places in school	45	32	13	10	3.12	Agreed
2	I prefer using a recommended face shield instead of a face mask due to its ease of use	38	36	14	12	3.00	Agreed
3	Am not comfortable coughing into my flexed elbow when am with friends in school	42	33	13	12	30.5	Agreed

4	I always cover my mouth when am sneezing in school	41	36	15	8	3.10	Agreed
5	I always wash my hands when entering and leaving the school premises	39	40	12	9	3.09	Agreed
6	I avoid touching my eyes nose and mouth unnecessarily	44	31	15	10	3.09	Agreed
7	I always use alcohol-based hand sanitizers in school	37	43	11	9	3.08	Agreed
8	I avoid handshakes in school	42	39	12	7	3.16	Agreed
9	I maintain social distance in school	35	41	13	11	3.00	Agreed
	Overall					3.07	Accepted

Table 2 shows questionnaire items 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9 with means scores of 3.12,3.00,3.05,3.10,3.09,3.09,3.08,3.1,3.00 in the order given, showing agreement. Conclusively, the overall mean score of 3.07 indicates that the way through which students develop positive attitudes towards COVID-19 precautionary measures include always putting on a facemask in crowded places, using a recommended face shield, not being comfortable coughing into flexed elbow when with friends in schools, by always cover the mouth when sneezing in school, wash of hands when entering and leaving the school premises, avoiding touching the eyes nose and mouth unnecessarily, using alcohol-based hand sanitizers in school, avoiding handshakes in school, maintaining social distance in school. Conclusively, there is a difference in attitude toward Covid-19 precautionary measures between male and female students in favour of male students.

### **Test of hypothesis**

Students' gender has no significant influence on their attitude towards COVID-19 precautionary measures. In this hypothesis, gender is the independent variable while students' attitude towards Covid-19 precautionary measures is the dependent variable. To test this hypothesis guiding the study, gender was categorized into two separate groups (Male and female), and based on the categorization, their means were compared using the independent t-test analysis, and the result is hereby presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Independent t-test analysis of the influence of gender on students' attitudes toward Covid-19 precautionary measures

Variable	N	X	SD	t	p-value
Male	55	28.62	4.62	7.215	.000
Female	45	22.75	3.51		
Total	100	25.98	3.22		

\*Significant at 0.05 level of significance

The findings from the analysis, which are shown in Table 3, showed that gender had a substantial impact on students' attitudes toward Covid-19 preventive measures ( $t=7.215$ ;  $p=0.000$ ). With this outcome, the alternative hypothesis was accepted and the null hypothesis was rejected at a significance level of 0.05. The outcome also demonstrates that male students with a mean score of 28.62 are more likely than their female counterparts with a mean score of 22.98 to have a favorable attitude toward following COVID-19 preventive measures.

### **Discussion**

This study carried out at the University of Calabar, Cross River State of Nigeria, sought to ascertain how students' attitudes toward COVID-19 preventive measures were influenced by their gender. Gender was thought to affect how students felt about taking precautions for COVID-19.

The findings discussion is offered as follows:

### **Gender and students' attitude towards COVID-19 precautionary measures**

The results of the data analyzed, refuted the null hypothesis, according to which there is no significant relationship between students' attitudes towards preventative measures for COVID-19 and their gender. This result did not come as a surprise because gender usually plays a role in determining some aspects of human behaviour with each gender likely to behave in a particular way in reaction to situations. The finding of this study is related to the findings of Bolarinwa, Olagunju, Babalola, and Saeed (2020) who examined the socio-demographic determinants of adherence to prescribed recommendations and the psychological effects of the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown among social media users and discovered that males had a higher compliance rate than their female counterpart even though the difference was not significant. In contrast, Ningsih, Eka, and Danal (2021) in their study discovered that both males and females were indifferent in their attitude toward covid-19 precautionary measures.

Based on the data collected and analyzed, it was discovered that students' gender significantly influenced their attitude toward COVID-19 precautionary measures. Precisely, the result tilted in favour of male students having a more positive attitude toward covid-19 precautionary measures than their female counterparts.

### **Conclusion**

About the findings of the study, it was concluded that students' gender significantly influences their attitude towards COVID-19 precautionary measures. In the study, gender was used to refer to someone being a man or a woman. Gender plays a significant role in the lives of individuals. People tend to behave differently and react differently to situations they find themselves due to their gender peculiarities. It is believed that some particular behaviours are peculiar to men while some are peculiar to women. This goes to define their disposition to certain

issues and situations. For this study, it was discovered that male students have more positive attitudes to COVID-19 precautionary measures than their female counterparts.

### **Recommendations**

About the results of the study, it is hereby recommended that the government, non-governmental organizations, civil society groups, and other stakeholders should facilitate an awareness campaign of COVID-19 precautionary measures in the school system. This is, however, because the school is a microcosm of society and as such should be treated as such granted that, there is no non-cure for the virus. This will help curb the spread of the virus and reduce the consequences associated with it such as deaths and discomfort that may also have a multiplier effect on society at large. There is a need for rehabilitation of infrastructure deployed for Covid-19 prevention. Regular water supply, functional water taps, provision of adequate classrooms and hostels for students, equipped medical centre, and motivated health and support staff.

### **Future research**

While the researchers may not claim that the research is concluded, they are of the view that further studies should be carried out as follows:

1. A study of this nature should be replicated on variables other than gender
2. A study should be conducted to find out students' compliance with COVID-19 precautionary measures within and outside the school premises

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