

Association between Cultural Practices and Hepatitis B and C Viral Infections in Billiri LGA Gombe State, Nigeria

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Background: Hepatitis is a significant public health problem that can result in serious conditions like liver cirrhosis and cancer. Cultural practices like sharing of toothbrushes, unsafe injection practices, unsterile incisions, tribal marks/tattoos, levirate marriages, beliefs, and unsafe Traditional circumcision practices can increase the risk of hepatitis. Understanding the cause will go a long way in preventing the spread of the disease. The Study Assessed the Association between Cultural Practices and Hepatitis B and C Viral Infections in Billiri LGA, Gombe State, Nigeria.

Methods: The study used a mixed-method approach, 430 sample participants were tested for HBV & HCV, and responded to a structured questionnaire for quantitative data collection. A Semi-structured interviewer guide was used for qualitative data, where 50 participants were selected from 5 sampled wards, including chiefs and traditional Medicine practitioners who were involved in FGDs. 10 Participants were selected as key informants (KIs) respectfully.

Results: The mean age of the participants was $41.8 \pm SD16.4$ In years, 52.1% were female, and 40% had secondary school education, the mean knowledge score of the participants was $62.3 \pm SD14.3$ and 67.4% had good knowledge of hepatitis infection. The mean cultural practice is $71.8 \pm SD 20.6$ and 85.6% had good cultural practices. More than half (53.5%) Some of the participants believed in traditional medicine practices. The prevalence of HBV, HCV, and HBV&HCV coinfections, are 25.8%, 17.9%, and 5.4%, respectively. There was a significant relationship between the cultural practices of the respondents and prevalence of hepatitis B ($p= 0.028$) and hepatitis C ($p=0.035$).

Conclusion: There is a high prevalence of Hepatitis B and C in Billiri LGA, Gombe State, Nigeria. Community Knowledge remains low, while cultural practices persist despite awareness. A multifaceted approach that combines education, healthcare policy reforms, and culturally Sensitive strategies are required to improve health-seeking behaviours in the community.