



**COVID-19: BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES OF MOBILE POPULACE TOWARD ITS SPREAD AND PREVENTION IN SELECTED LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS OF IBADAN, OYO STATE**

**Abejide Lewis Olumuyiwa, Abubakar Alhassan and Ayiwulu Ezekiel**

Department of Geography, Faculty of Social Sciences, Federal University of Lafia, Lafia, Nasarawa State.

**ABSTRACT:** *The study examined the beliefs and attitudes of mobile populace, particularly, the commercial motorcyclists and their passengers toward the spread, prevention of and the roles of governments on Covid-19. Conspiracy theory provided the theoretical framework. Research survey design and quantitative methods were adopted for data collection. Two Local Government Areas (LGAs) were selected in Ibadan, namely: Ibadan North-west and Egbeda. Ifeleye/Ogunpa and Iyana Agbala garages were purposively selected in the two LGAs, respectively. A structured questionnaire on beliefs, attitudes and government roles toward the spread and prevention of Covid-19 was administered on 50 motorcyclists in each garage. Descriptive statistics were used for data analyses. The findings showed that a motorcyclist in the selected garages has an average of 20 trips and body contacts with 80 probable carriers of Covid-19 per day. Nearly all (98.8%) respondents believed Covid-19 is real, and mostly (43.8%) informed of the virus through social media. Close to three-fifths (58.7%) of the respondents in Iyana Agbala garage disagreed with some religious leaders' denial of Covid-19, while 25.8 per cent in Ifeleye/Ogunpa agreed. Majority (62.2%) of the respondents in both garages believed Covid-19 spreads through coughing and sneezing. Nearly all the respondents (97.9%) in both garages always use face mask. Over half of the respondents (53.3%) suggested arrest and fine for flouting the health guidelines preventing the spread of the pandemic. Covid-19 is real and has come to stay, therefore, governments at all levels should intensify enlightenment programmes to mitigate the clinical transmission and prevention.*

**KEYWORDS:** Covid-19, Beliefs and Attitudes, Spread and Prevention, Mobile Populace.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Federal Government of Nigeria pronounced the first and second phases of the total lockdown ease for Covid-19 pandemic respectively, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of May and 4<sup>th</sup> of June, 2020 with some specific health guidelines. These guidelines partially opened up the socioeconomic activities viz: human mobility, transportation, trading and other social engagements of the populace. Although those guidelines were meant to prevent the clinical spread of Covid-19 but are alien to the people's day to day life styles or habitual characters prior the virus insurgence. It has therefore been observed that after some weeks of the ease on the lockdown, mobile populace has relaxed to observing the rudiments of the health guidelines given by government, which include; the use of face mask, physical/safe distancing and washing of hands with water and sanitizer. The negligence observed among this mobile populace, particularly the commercial motorcyclists, could perhaps trigger daily increase of new cases



of Covid-19 in the country. For instance, according to Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC), as at the 8<sup>th</sup> of July 2020; barely a month after the second phase of the ease, the confirmed cases recorded in the country stood at 30,249, with 599; daily mean of new cases (NCDC, 2020). These values, when compared with the same values during the lockdown revealed a daily gradual increase of the infected people. This means that Covid-19 is becoming a gradual ravaging disease in the country. In addition, the WHO in its report currently placed Nigeria in the second position after South Africa in the continent (WHO, 2020).

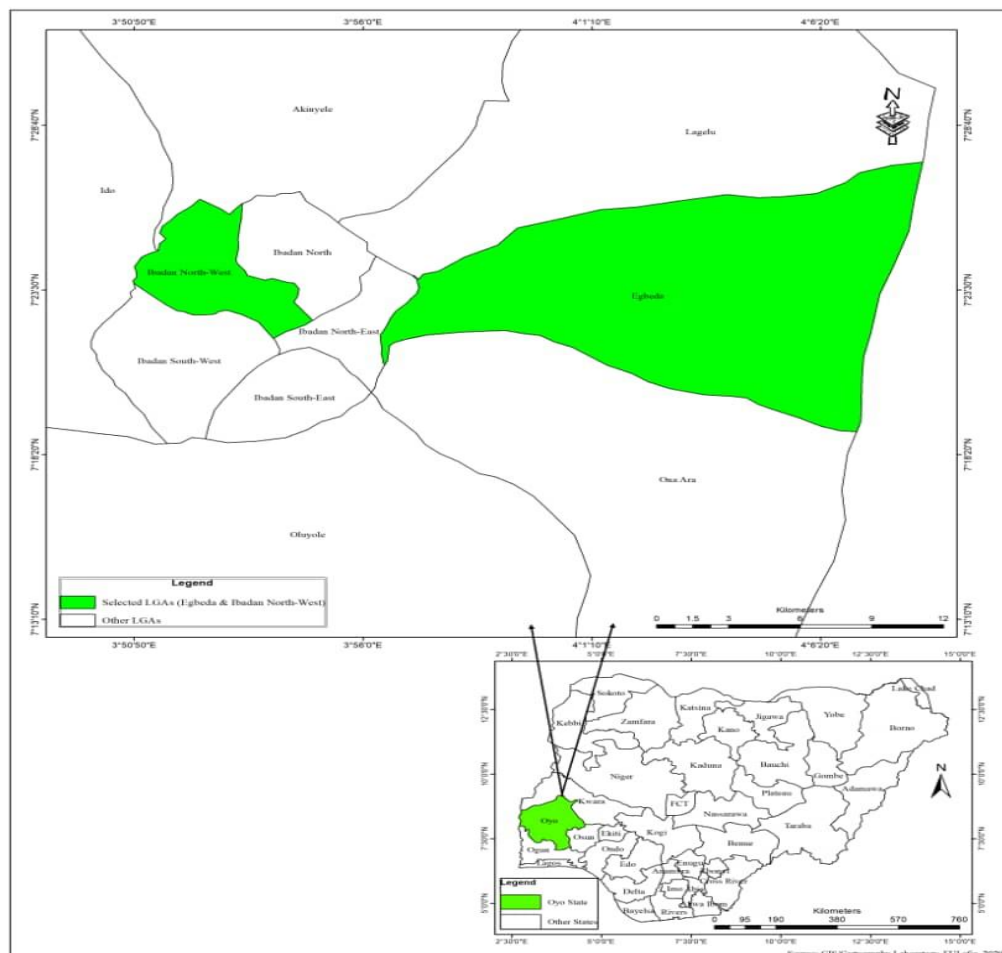
Based on the above background, two questions were posed for the study. One, do the mobile populace, particularly the commercial motorcyclists believe in the presence and existence of coronavirus? Two, if they do, what is their attitude towards the spread of the virus? In order to answer the above questions, the following objectives were aimed at: to, 1) examine the beliefs of commercial motorcyclists in the reality and existence of Covid-19 pandemic in the country, 2) examine the attitudes of the commercial motorcyclists and their passengers toward the spread and prevention of the virus, and 3) determine the roles of governments at all levels in flattening the curve of the pandemic, particularly in Oyo State and Nigeria in general.

Covid-19 pandemic has been conceptualized from different theories, among which were several conspiracy theories. According to Simons, (2020) Covid-19 was conceptualized by some, as some spurious mythical narratives, filled with alternatives facts, folk science that could not be proved scientifically and fringe beliefs by some religious leaders, not only in Africa, but all over the world. The United States (US) had come up with a conspiracy theory curiously contending the rolling out of the fifth generation (5G) network by the Chinese and other stakeholders as the cause of the pandemic in December 2019 (CNN, 2020). In early 2020, conspiracy theorists in Canada falsely claimed that the coronavirus pandemic was an elaborate hoax (Grudz and Mai, 2020). The theory was premised on the baseless assumption that if hospital parking lots and waiting rooms were empty then the pandemic must not be real or it was not as severe as reported by the health authorities. Adding to the theories, were the mystical narratives and fringe belief of some religious leaders.

According to Muritala (2020), he narrates that some Christian religious leaders had linked the pandemic to the 5G network, as a product of satanic secret agent Illuminati, with the aim of transforming mankind into hybrid of human and machine. He further explains that the satanic agents will soon introduce a Covid-19 vaccine, which will actually be a serum filled with nano-microchips that will be introduced into human body. The microchips would be controlled via 5G technology and be used to read human thought and force them to worship Satan instead of God. In the same hand, the nano-microchips have been linked with the forthcoming apocalypse that would precede the end of the world (The Guardian, 2020). Muritala (2020) added that an Islamic religious leader had claimed that Covid-19 was a farce, maliciously and illusion fabricated by western agents in order to prevent their followers from performing their religious rites of; praying together and performing religious pilgrimage. In order to prove their theories, the religious leaders used series of pandemic or dystopian films, featuring global pandemic produced by the western film corporations. However, since religious leaders are keen to the social structure of the society (Turner, 2001), the study is pivoted on some of the religious leaders' conspiracy theories to ascertain the beliefs and attitudes of mobile populace, particularly the commercial motorcyclists, who may likely belong to either of the prominent religions (Christianity and Islam) in the country.

## METHODOLOGY

Research survey designs, quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection were adopted for the study. Commercial motorcyclists were the targeted mobile populace. The selection of motorcyclists is premised on three postulations: motorcyclists are, 1) exposed to air when riding motorcycles, 2) regularly having close body contacts with their passengers, and 3) always in cluster contact with their colleagues while parking in their garages. Two Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Oyo State were selected in Ibadan, namely: Ibadan North-west and Egbeda as indicated in Fig. 1.



**Figure 1: Map of Nigeria and Oyo State Showing Ibadan North West and Egbeda LGAs**

Ifeleye/Ogunpa and Iyana Agbala garages were purposively selected in the two LGAs respectively. This is based on the interconnectivity route of commuters between the two LGAs. A structured questionnaire on the spatio-temporal mobility of respondents, beliefs of the reality and spread of Covid-19 pandemic, attitudes toward spread and prevention of the virus populace and the role of government to mitigate the pandemic was randomly administered on 50 commercial motorcyclists in each of the garages. Data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed via the use of SPSS<sup>+</sup> version 25. Descriptive statistics were adopted to analyze the data collected.



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of Ninety-six (96) questionnaires were returned out of 100 randomly distributed to the respondents in the selected two garages. All (50) administered questionnaires in Ifeleye-Ogunpa garage (Ibadan North-west LGA) were returned while 46 from Iyana-Agbala (Egbeda LGAs) garage. On the whole, the returned questionnaires represent 96.0 per cent of the total questionnaire distributed.

### Spatio-Temporal Mobility of Respondents in the two Garages

The study reveals that a motorcyclist in the two garages, on the average, has an approximated 20 trips and a standard deviation of  $\pm 10.4$  to and from, per day. This translates to a cyclist possibly having body contacts with almost 80 persons per day.

**Table 1: Average Trips to and from of a selected Motorcyclist per day in the two Garages**

	Min trip	Max trip	Mean	Standard Deviation
Average number of to-and-fro trips of a motorcyclist in a day	3	45	19.8	10.4

Source: Authors' Fieldwork, 2020

By inference, a total of 96 respondents would be having body contacts with 7,840 persons or more in a day. However, this could trigger the increase of the new cases in Ibadan and Oyo State in general, if the mobile populace (both motorcyclists and passengers) keeps on disregarding the guidelines of containing the spread of pandemic.

### Beliefs in the Reality and Presence of Covid-19 in Nigeria by Respondents in the two Garages

Nearly all (98.9%), 89 out of 90 respondents agreed with government of the reality and presence of Covid-19 in the country, as against very few (1.1%), as revealed in Table 2.

**Table 2: Beliefs in the reality and presence of Covid-19 in Nigeria by Respondents in the two Garages**

		Name of Garage					
		Ifeleye/Ogunpa Zone		Iyana Agbala Zone		Total	
		Freq	(%)	Freq	(%)	Freq	(%)
Do you believe with government that Covid-19 is real in Nigeria?	Yes	48	53.3	41	45.6	89	98.9
	No	0	0	1	1.1	1	1.1
	Total	48	53.3	42	46.7	90	100

Source: Authors' Fieldwork, 2020



By inference, the beliefs of the presence and reality of the virus the majority of the motorcyclists is encouraging and this could be a starting point of minimizing the spread, if the belief is ubiquitous.

### Means of Awareness of Covid-19 by Respondents in the two Garages

The study shows that over two-fifths (43.8%) of the respondents were being informed of Covid-19 through the social media, one-third (31.3%) through the radio and less than one-fifth (18.8%) through television while very few of them (6.3%) through family and friends. However, there was a sharp contrast in each of the garages. Bulks of respondents (24.0%) in Ifeleye/Ogunpa got to know about Covid-19 through radio while majority of them (33.3%) in Iyana Agbala, through social media as shown on Table 3.

**Table 3: Means of Awareness of Covid-19 by Respondents in the two Garages**

		Name of Garage					
		Ifeleye/Ogunpa Zone		Iyana Agbala		Total	
		Freq	(%)	Freq	(%)	Freq	(%)
How were you been informed that Covid-19 is real?	Through the Radio	23	24.0	7	7.3	30	31.3
	Through the Television	13	13.5	5	5.2	18	18.8
	Through the Social Media	10	10.4	32	33.3	42	43.8
	Through family and Friends	4	4.2	2	2.1	6	6.3
	Total	50	52.1	46	47.9	96	100

*Source: Authors' Fieldwork, 2020*

This translates that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) through the use of mobile phones with internet and social media apps cum the in-built radio with high frequency modulation (FM) that could link several radio stations as many as possible has helped in disseminating information about the virus among the mobile populace in the study area and beyond.

### Beliefs and Attitudes of Respondents on the Perceptions of Some Religious Leaders on Covid-19 in the two Garages

The study reveals that out of 46 respondents in Iyana Agbala garage, majority (34; 73.9%) disagreed with religious leaders that denied the presence and reality of Covid-19 while minority (11; 23.9%) agreed. In contrast, half of the respondents; 25 out of 50 (50.0%) in Ifeleye/Ogunpa garage agreed with some religious leaders that denied the reality of Covid-19 while 24 (48.0%) disagreed as indicated in Table 4. Based on the close margin of respondents in Ifeleye/Ogunpa garage, a serious and rigorous convincing enlightenment on Covid-19 is very imperative. The table further reveals that half (50.0%) of the respondents that agreed with denying religious leaders perceived Covid-19 as a sign of the end-time. Over one-fifth (23.7%) seen it as a means to embezzle public fund, 15.8 per cent believed the virus to be a



myth while very few 7.9 and 2.6 per cent believed that the virus is a disease of the rich people and a China conspiracy respectively.

**Table 4: Beliefs and Attitudes of Respondents on the Perceptions of some Religious Leaders on Covid-19 in the two Garages**

Question	Response	Name of Garage					
		Ifeleye/Ogunpa Zone		Iyana Agbala		Total	
		Freq	(%)	Freq	(%)	Freq	(%)
Do you agree with some religious leaders that denied the reality of Covid-19 in Nigeria?	Agreed	25	25.8	11	11.3	36	37.1
	Disagreed	24	24.7	34	35.1	58	59.8
	No Idea	1	1	1	2.1	2	3.1
	Total	50	51.5	46	48.5	96	100
<b>Question</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Freq</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Freq</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Freq</b>	<b>(%)</b>
If you agree with the religious leaders' denial of Covid-19, what are your reasons?	It was a myth	4	10.5	2	5.3	6	15.8
	Means of embezzling public money	6	15.8	3	7.9	9	23.7
	Sign of the end-time	13	34.2	6	15.8	19	50
	Disease of rich people	1	2.6	0	0	1	2.6
	China conspiracy	2	5.3	1	2.6	3	7.9
	Total	26	68.4	12	31.6	38	100
<b>Question</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Freq</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Freq</b>	<b>(%)</b>	<b>Freq</b>	<b>(%)</b>
If you disagreed with the religious leader's denial of Covid-19, how does the virus spread?	Coughing and sneezing	11	16.7	30	45.5	41	62.2
	Rubbing of eyes, nose and mouth with hands	18	27.3	3	4.5	21	31.8
	Touching & hugging people	1	1.5	1	1.5	2	3
	Not following government guidelines	0	0	2	3	2	3
	Total	30	45.5	36	54.5	66	100

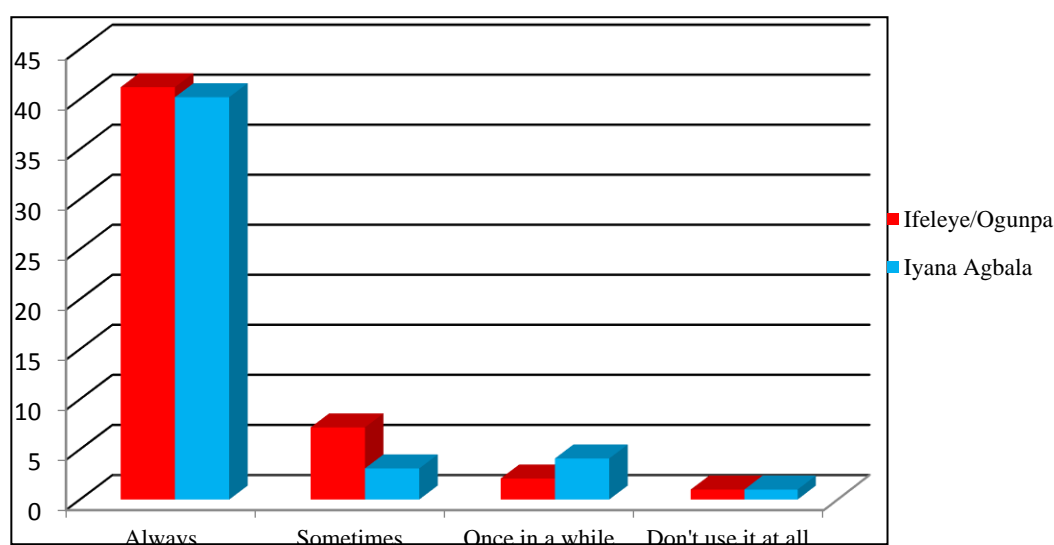
Source: Authors' Fieldwork, 2020

Since all these conspiracies are peddling by some religious leaders that are stakeholders in the social structure of the society and being absorbed by their followers with no scientific evidences, this could enhance the spread of the virus and possibly pose a serious danger to the public health if not checked. Over three-fifths (62.2%) of respondents that disagreed with the speculations of some religious leaders believed Covid-19 spreads through coughing and

sneezing. One-third (33.1%) of them were aware of its spread through rubbing of eyes, nose and mouth with hands while very few (3.0% each) believed that the virus spreads by touching or hugging people, and not following government guidelines. The beliefs of the existence of Covid-19 coupled with the understanding of modes of transmission would equip the mobile populace to know how to curtail the spread of the virus.

### Attitudes of Respondents on the Use of Face Mask to Prevent the Spread of Covid-19 in the two Garages

Majority of the respondents; 41.2 and 40.2 per cent respectively in Ifeleye/Ogunpa and Iyana Agbala reported to be using face mask always, very few; 9.4 and 7.3 per cent were either using face mask occasionally, once in a while or not using it at all as revealed in Figure 2.



**Figure 2: Attitudes of Respondents on the use of face mask toward the spread of Covid-19 in the two garages**

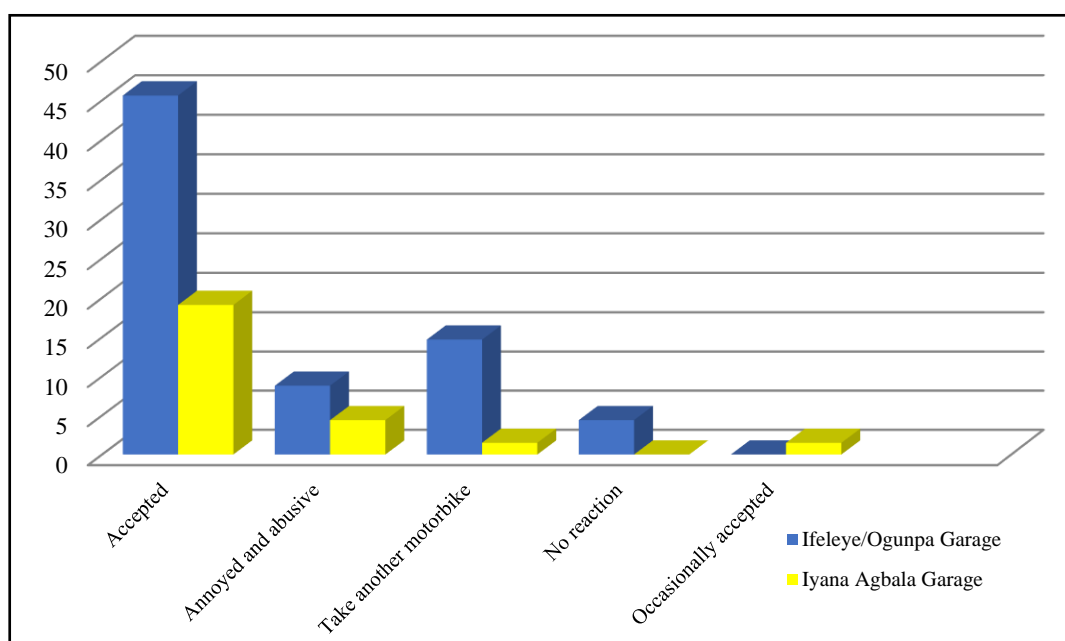
*Source: Authors' Fieldwork, 2020*

In sum, the riders would be able to protect their eyes, mouth and nose from infection if face mask is regularly and correctly used. However, in the real world, it has been observed that most motorcyclists in the study area and other places in Ibadan were not using face mask at all while some of them using it incorrectly.

### Attitudes of Respondents on the Use of Face Mask by Passengers to Prevent the Spread of Covid-19 in the two Garages

Figure 3 reveals the attitudes of passengers whenever being asked to wear face mask. Majority of the respondents (45.6% and 19.1%) reported that their passengers would accept the use of face mask whenever they asked to do so. This is followed by respondents (14.7%) in Ifeleye/Ogunpa that said passengers would take another bike. Another prominent attitude

by passengers as the request to use face mask as revealed by respondents in Ifeleye/Ogunpa and Iyana Agbala garages, respectively were annoyed and abusive (8.8% and 4.4%), no reaction (4.4%), and occasionally accepted to use face mask (1.5%) were reported in Ifeleye/Ogunpa and Iyana Agbala concurrently.



**Figure 3: Attitudes of Respondents on the use of face mask by Passengers to prevent the spread of Covid-19 in the two garages**

*Source: Authors' Fieldwork, 2020*

Generally, motorbike passengers are mostly “fast and furious” in nature and because of their hastiness, they mostly forgotten to either use face mask or take it along whenever going out but in order to cover up, they could be claiming the “customer is always right,” slogan. In sum, most motorbike passengers and other commuters are putting on nonchalant attitudes toward the use of face mask, which is one of the major guidelines of preventing the spread of Covid-19.

#### **Attitudes of Respondents on Safe Distancing to Prevent the Spread of Covid-19 by in the two Garages**

The study shows that over three-quarters (78.4%) of the respondents agreed with safe distancing of 2m or 6ft apart, from person to another to minimize Covid-19 spread. Less than one-fifth (17.5%) were conscious of prohibition of touching or hugging while very few (4.1%) understood the use of elbow to greet. In addition, majority of the respondents in both garages; Ifeleye/Ogunpa (37.1%) and Iyana Agbala (41.2%) understood the safe distancing of keeping distance of 2 meters or 6 feet apart as one of the preventive measures to prevent Covid-19.





**Table 5: Attitudes of Respondents on Safe Distancing to prevent the Spread of Covid-19 in the two Garages**

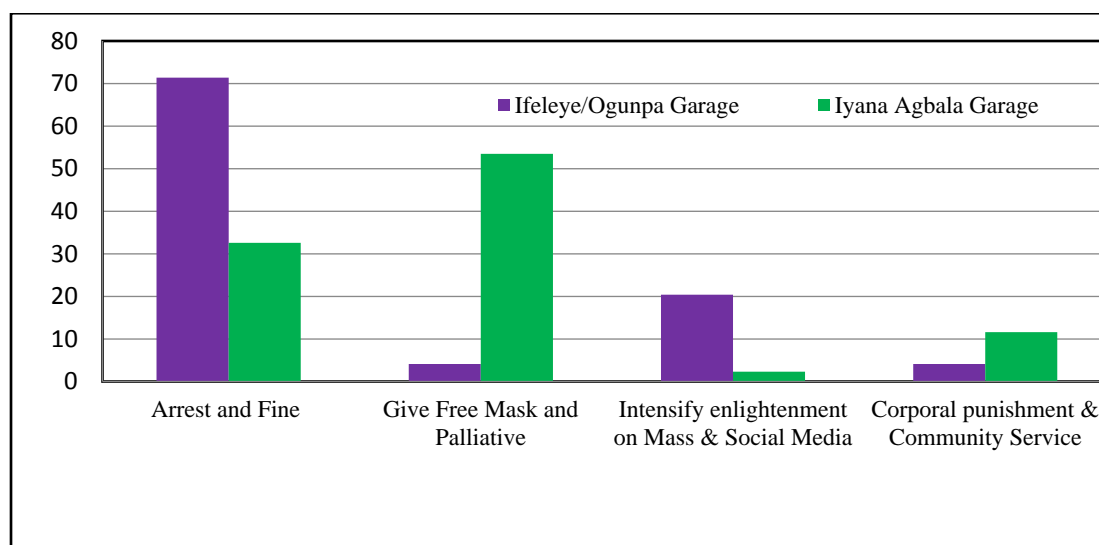
		Name of Garage					
		Ifeleye/Ogunpa Zone		Iyana Agbala		Total	
		Freq	(%)	Freq	(%)	Freq	(%)
How do you understand social/safe distancing?	Keep distance of 2 meters or 6 feet	35	37.1	40	41.2	75	78.4
	No touching or hugging	11	11.3	6	6.2	17	17.5
	Use of elbow to greet one another	3	3.1	1	1	4	4.1
	Total	49	51.5	47	48.5	96	100

*Source: Authors' Fieldwork, 2020*

Although it is impossible to create 2m or 6ft safe distance between the motorbike riders and their passengers, still, the spread of the virus would be curtailed through body contacts, if the policy of one passenger per trip is implemented, and the use of face mask by the commercial motorcyclists and the passengers is encouraged.

#### **Suggested roles of government in preventing the spread of Covid-19 by Respondents in the two Garages**

The reactions of respondents to the roles of governments in preventing the spread of Covid-19 in the two garages differ sharply. Majority of respondents (71.4%) in Ifeleye/Ogunpa garage suggested arrest and fine of persons flouting the preventive guidelines of Covid-19 while less than one-third of respondents in Iyana Agbala garage proposed the same. Meanwhile, bulk of respondents (53.3%) in Iyana Agbala garage suggested the distribution of free mask and palliative to the masses, as the role of government in preventing the spread of Covid-19 but very few of them (4.1%) in Ifeleye/Ogunpa garage supported such role.



**Figure 4: Suggested roles of government in preventing the spread of Covid-19 by Respondents in the two Garages**

*Source: Authors' Fieldwork, 2020*

Another prominent suggestion was the intensifying enlightenment on mass and social media, which was proposed by sizable respondents (20.4%) in Ifeleye/Ogunpa garage, with few (2.3%) responding to such in Iyana Agbala garage. Respondents from both garages were of less opinion on corporal punishment and community service to be meted out to erring persons violating the health guidelines against the spread of Covid-19, as indicated in Figure 4.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, the study has established that mobile populace, particularly the commercial motorcyclists and their passengers are conscious of the reality and presence of Covid-19 within their localities and in the country as a whole. Also, that they were aware of the mode of clinical transmission and prevention of the virus. However, some of them are still skeptical about the prevalence of the virus based on the denials from some religious leaders, who might have eroded their beliefs on the reality and existence of the pandemic. However, based on ground truth evidence, most of the motorcyclists are not abiding with the clinical guidelines of preventing Covid-19 within the localities (see Plates 1 & 2).

In the light of the above results and findings on the beliefs and attitudes of mobile populace (particularly the motorcyclists) as regards the reality and spread of Covid-19, the following recommendations were therefore presented:

1. Each state governor should come up with a signed executive order to make the use face mask and creating safe distancing compulsory in their respective states in containing the pandemic.

2. Government at the state level should give out free mask to every citizen in their respective states and this should continue until the pandemic is contained. This would justify any means of enforcing non-usage of face mask by the populace.
3. Lastly, governments at all levels should continue to educate the masses on the importance of self-protection through the clinical guidelines put up by NCDC and Federal Ministry of Health. Also, government should carry along the religious and community leaders by convincing them with facts of the virus cases and sensitizing them about the reality of Covid-19 by encouraging them to domesticate such knowledge to their followers and subjects.

In conclusion, Covid-19 is novel, real and will stay with the human race for unknown period of time, therefore, the above recommendations are to be taken and addressed seriously by all levels of governments (local, state and federal), without which, the whole country would be drastically ravaged by the pandemic.



**Plate 1: Commercial motorcyclists in Ifeleye/Ogunpa garage, commuting passengers without face mask and no physical or safe distancing with their passenger and other commuters.**

*Source: The picture was taken on Monday, 6 July 2020, 11:48 am.*



**Plate 2: Commercial motorcyclists and their passenger along Iyana Agbala Road with close body contact and without face mask.**

*Source: The picture was taken on Friday, 5 July 2020, 6:24 pm.*

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