

Abstract

Background: Nigeria is located within the tropics with an average temperature of about 27°C and precipitation of 11.5mm. It frequently experiences direct and indirect climate change extreme events such as flooding, drought vector and water borne diseases. Vector borne diseases such as Malaria are considered endemic in some regions and malaria is reported as 60% cause of hospital visit in Nigeria. With a huge population of over 140 million, a health disaster on population will be catastrophic and all efforts should be made to prevent it. The nation is struggling with climate change adaptation and mitigation effort, and building a formidable health system with climate change knowledgeable health workers may be one of the best ways to prepare for any unplanned climate change health impact situation. Thus assess the perception of climate impact on public health by health workers is timely. The study attempted to unravel the health workers knowledge of climate change health impact, their attitude and practice and their preparedness to healthcare in event of disaster due to climate change and the gender dimension of the findings. The study analyzed the health related disease occurrence in Abuja with a particular focus on malaria in 2013.

Method: A cross-sectional descriptive approach was employed using both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. A survey was conducted between November 10 – Dec 4th 2013 using structured and semi-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered to 53 health workers (11 doctors, 10 pharmacists, 18 nurses, 7 laboratory scientists, and 7 medical record officers) in Wuse general Hospital (WGH) and Maitama District Hospital (MDH) to enquire about their perception of climate impact on public health and their preparedness in the face of climate change health disaster. Evaluation of disease trend was done using malaria reported cases from WGH in 2013 against the climate factors of temperature and precipitation.

Results: The knowledge of health workers on the climate change and its health impact were limited to simple definitions like “seasonal variation in weather” and “change in atmospheric conditions” with 94% of the respondent saying that it is a problem. 91% of the total respondents agreed that Climate change has some form of health impacts which includes vector borne diseases like malaria. A high proportion (74%, $\chi^2=3.651$, $p=0.056$), reasoned that the health workers have roles (Awareness/health education, disease trend research etc) yet the preparedness of health workers and health system was very poor with 19% having prior experience with such extreme events with focus on malaria.

Conclusion: Health workers knowledge and awareness about climate change health impact is high though limited to simple definition but their preparedness and that of health institution is low.

Recommendation: Capacity building of health workers and equipment of the health system to be able to prevent and respond to insurgence of such disease in the face of climate change health impact will be highly recommended to avoid catastrophe on a huge population.