

Private Sector Healthcare Seeking for Tuberculosis in the time of COVID-19: Experiences from two Nigerian Cities

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Background

- As a direct cause of the COVID-19 pandemic, **services** that cater to individuals with tuberculosis (TB) **have been disrupted**
- In 24 countries surveyed across Africa, there was approximately a **28% reduction in case referrals**
 - Almost a third of all people who should have been referred for further testing and diagnostics for **suspected TB were missed**
- Nigeria's healthcare sector is **majorly driven by private providers**; the private sector approximately administers 78% of total health expenditure
- However, the **effect that COVID-19** is having on this already fragmented health care sector is **unclear**.

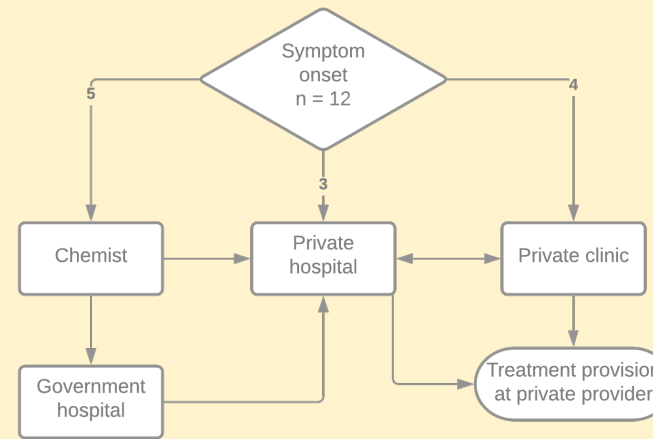
Purpose

To examine and quantify the **delays** caused by the COVID-19 pandemic that individuals in Nigeria are facing while trying to **access care, diagnosis, and treatment for TB** in the private sector.

Participants and methods

- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with consenting men (n=10) and women (n=10) between the age of 18-65 from Lagos (n=10) and Kano (n=10), Nigeria
 - Individuals with TB on treatment (n = 12)
 - Individuals presenting to private provider facilities with respiratory illnesses (n = 8)
- Interview guide focused on steps individuals with TB took while seeking care (screening, diagnosis, treatment), delays that they faced due to the pandemic, and direct and indirect costs of care
- Thematic analysis was conducted using Quirkos v2.4.1

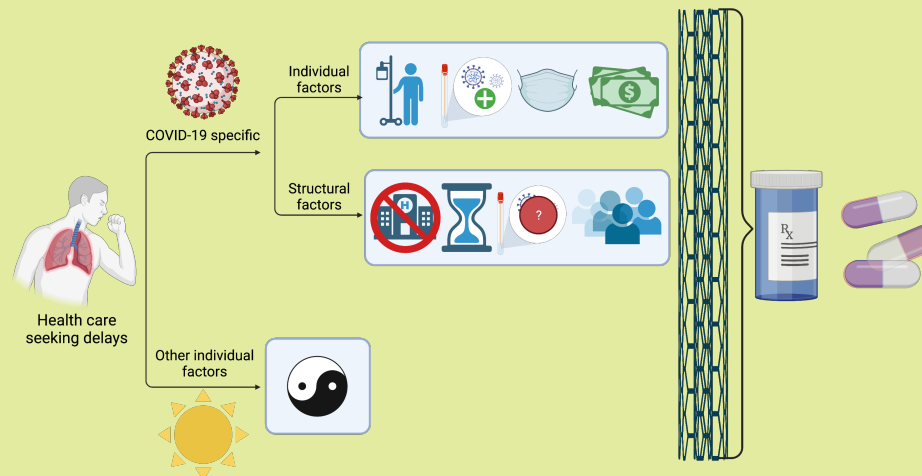
Health-seeking pathways in Tuberculosis care



Pathways for individuals with TB are unique and complex

- Individuals generally sought care with informal providers (chemists and pharmacists) upon initial symptoms
- When minor symptoms became more severe, or when they didn't subside, a physician was sought
- Referrals from smaller providers to hospitals for diagnostics were common
- Participants indicated feeling relief upon diagnosis
- When diagnosed, all were put on TB treatment the same day/next day

Delays in first healthcare seeking: themes and observations



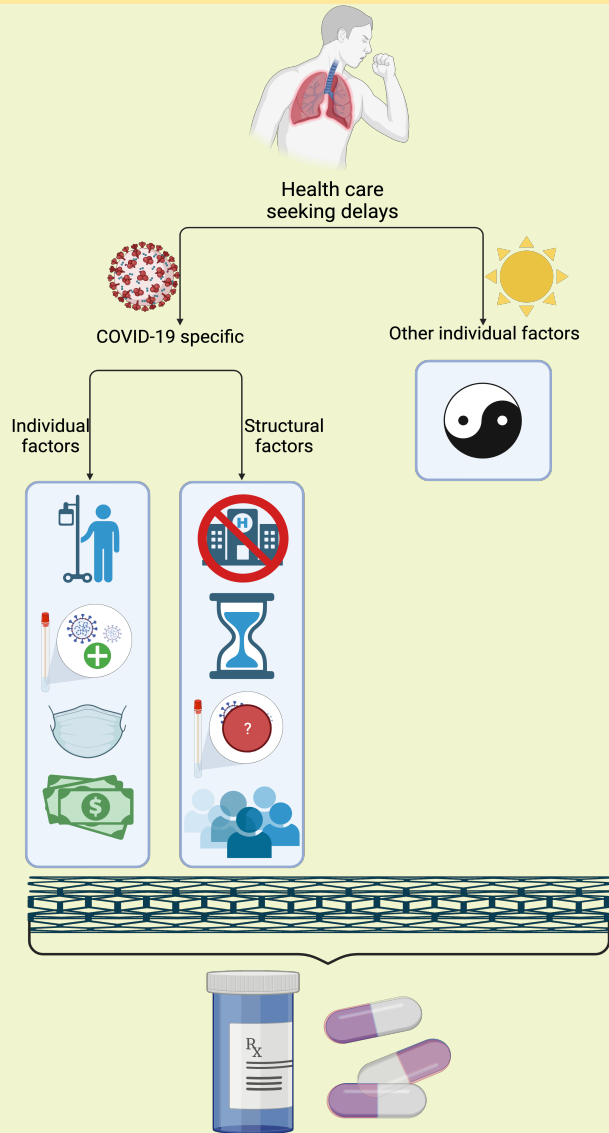
- Deliberately avoiding healthcare due to fear of COVID-19 infection, etc.
- Unable to access healthcare: movement restrictions etc.
- Healthcare workers providing inadequate services
- Private hospitals had to close
- Increasing prices
- Perceiving their symptoms to not be *that serious*

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Delays in first healthcare seeking: themes and observations



Individual factors due to COVID-19

Deliberately avoiding healthcare

“The fear of **being infected** made us stay at home”
 “... putting on nose mask was **not well-enforced.**”
 “I had the fear of going to health facility, so, I will **not be tested positive for COVID-19.**”
 “... whenever you go to hospital there are **lots of protocols.**”
 “I don't like that covid19 protocols, **putting face masks** don't allow me to breath well.”

Unable to access healthcare

“One of the major challenges I faced is the **restrictions of movement** ... if you are sick you **can't go to hospital freely** without being interrupted by the police or COVID-19 task force”
 “We **don't have money** to go to the private hospital.”
 “You see during the pandemic, **movement is restricted**”
 “At that time, **you couldn't get vehicle** that will take you to the facility”
 “... affects me during lockdown that I **couldn't get access to the hospital**”

Structural factors due to COVID-19

Healthcare workers providing inadequate services

“The doctors around will be **harassing people** without considering the condition”
 “It took me a **long time** to get my test result from the state public hospital ... I moved to the private hospital”
 “When you go to the hospital, the **health care providers won't pay attention** to you”
 “The **healthcare providers were dispersed** to COVID-19 task force”
 “They **should check up on the person**, they should know how the person is doing, they should not just give drugs out and saying the person will be fine”
 “There was **congestion**, too much **death rate**”
 “I've been using malaria drugs ... because our **family nurse told us** that it was malaria”
Private hospitals had to close
 “... some private **hospitals were closed** as a result of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic”
Prices have increased
 “Only that cost of living became **expensive**”
 “Till now they've **not reduced** the transport fare”
 “Things are now **expensive**. Transport, food and all have all increased”

Individual factors

Understanding their symptoms to not be 'that' serious

“We thought is the **normal cough** and catarrh, thinking it will go soon”
 “I had no idea it was TB, I thought it was the **normal sickness** like malaria and typhoid before I came to run a test as it was getting worse”