



**OPERATIONAL
RESEARCH
SNAPSHOT**

Community perceptions and understanding of risk of Lassa Fever in Nigeria

Because early symptoms of Lassa Fever (LF) can look like other illnesses, it is often hard to diagnose quickly, and many hospitalized patients do not survive.

Nigeria experiences seasonal outbreaks, making public health communication essential for early care seeking.

This study, carried out in 2024 in three Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Ebonyi State, explored how people understand LF, how fear and stigma shape their actions, and what influences when and how they seek care.

We conducted interviews and group discussions with survivors, caregivers, healthcare workers, and community members to identify key themes.





Participants showed high awareness of LF, but many struggled to connect official prevention messages with their daily realities. Survivors and community members often did not know how infection occurred, which fueled fear and stigma.



Three views of LF emerged depending on people's direct or indirect experiences:

- that it is treatable;
- that it is inevitably deadly;
- or that it is caused by poisoning or spiritual forces rather than a virus.



Care was often sought late because early symptoms were mistaken for other diseases like malaria, and because of financial or access barriers.



Key takeaways

Effective LF prevention communication must start from the recognition that people's risk perceptions are shaped by their lived realities, not simply by the information they receive.

Participatory approaches, i.e. working closely with local actors helps with grounding messages and their credibility, and strengthening trust. Integrating psychosocial support can help counter fear and stigma.

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