

Title: Conspiracy beliefs, institutional mistrust, and health-related behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic in Burkina Faso: a mediation analysis.

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Abstract

This study aims to deepen the understanding of the relationship between institutional mistrust, conspiracy beliefs, and health-related behaviors in the context of a low-income country during the COVID-19 pandemic. A survey was conducted among the general adult population of Burkina Faso, collecting data on institutional mistrust, conspiracy beliefs, health-related behaviors (i.e., vaccination attitudes, agreement to sanitary measures, and containment-related behaviors), information-seeking behaviors (including traditional and digital sources of information), and negative sentiments. A mediation analysis was employed to examine the direct effect of institutional mistrust on health-related behaviors and its indirect effect through conspiracy beliefs endorsement. Additionally, the effects of information-seeking behaviors and negative sentiments on mistrust and conspiracy beliefs were explored. We find that institutional mistrust has a direct negative effect on all health-related behaviors and an indirect effect through conspiracy beliefs which themselves have a direct negative effect on protective behaviors. The partial mediation accounted for 12% (agreement with sanitary measures) to 34% (vaccination attitudes) of the total effect of institutional mistrust on health-related behaviors. Information seeking on traditional media and negative sentiments had positive effects on conspiracy beliefs and institutional mistrust, respectively. The findings highlight the significant adverse impact of institutional mistrust and conspiracy belief endorsement on containment-related behaviors, vaccination attitudes, and agreement with sanitary measures among the adult population of Burkina Faso. The study offers valuable insights into the complex interplay of various factors influencing COVID-19 attitudes and behaviors, thereby providing useful guidance for African policymakers in designing effective prevention and information campaigns.