

BBYDI Executes Public Health Training on COVID-19 Prevention at Places of Worship

On the 5th of December 2020, Brain Builders Youth Development Initiative organized a Public Health Training on COVID-19 Prevention at Places of Worship for religious leaders in North Central Nigeria. The event, held Online via the Zoom platform was sponsored by the KAICIID Dialogue Centre. The event focused on educating selected religious leaders on prevention mechanisms for COVID-19 in their places of worship. Two Guest lecturers, Dr Natasha Aduloju-Ajjola and Dr Abdulmusawwir Alli-Oluwafuyi addressed the audience.

The first presenter, Dr Natasha, a Public Health Consultant, started her presentation with a brief overview of the COVID-19 figures in Nigeria. She highlighted hotspot areas and the current situation in various states across the country. She identified two primary challenges to the prevention of the virus in Nigeria – apathy and distrust. Apathy, she explains, represents a group of citizens who have refused to wear masks or follow the prevention guidelines while the second challenge is with the distrust in the fact that COVID-19 exists in Nigeria. She noted that these challenges could lead to a second wave of COVID-19 in Nigeria. She also addressed the fears surrounding the use of COVID-19 vaccines and said that combating fake news is critical to mitigating these fears.

Dr Natasha concluded her presentation by sharing tips on how to stop fake news and also gave recommendations on managing gatherings in worship places such as reducing gatherings and following the existing prevention guidelines. She advised religious leaders to use their discretion and knowledge of the virus to manage their gatherings.

Dr Abdulmusawwir, a lecturer in the Department of Pharmacology and Therapeutics at the College of Health Sciences, University of Ilorin, focused on deepening the knowledge on COVID-19 and providing more information to assist religious leaders in stepping down lesson learned to their congregations. He highlighted the burden of COVID-19 on our Healthcare facilities and individuals who have to stay for an extended period in the hospital. He discussed the growing evidence of other health issues that have affected people who have recovered from COVID-19, such as memory loss, acute kidney injury, depression, loss of smell, etc. therefore, he encouraged participants to tell their congregations not to overlook COVID-19 despite the high rate of recovery. He gave a roadmap for the preventing the virus, which include, understanding its nature, curtailing its spread through non-pharmaceutical interventions such as handwashing, social distancing, face-masking, isolation/quarantine, etc. He advised religious organizations to carry out regular disinfection in their places of worship, conducting infra-red thermometers temperature checks and to maintain social distancing. He proposed that religious leaders should identify worship activities that can be carried

out privately and encourage their members to engage in them to reduce the number of physical gatherings.

At the end of the presentations, participants were allowed to make comments and ask questions. One of the participants, Sheikh Huseyn Zakariyah, in his comments cited the example of the involvement of clerics in fighting poliomyelitis through proper education. This made it easy to spread the knowledge of the disease and allowed acceptance of the vaccinations. He, therefore, noted that the same approach is crucial in curbing the spread of COVID-19. Mr Simon Julius Arabo admonished the government to do better in following COVID-19 protocols as their violation of protocols in political rallies and gatherings imply that COVID-19 is non-existent which make it difficult for religious leaders to convince the people of its existence.