

Influence of COVID-19 on the Activities of Bank Employees in Conakry in 2021

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To cite this article:

Habib Toure, Bocar Baïla Diédhiou, Cheik Amadou Toure, Hassane Bah. Influence of COVID-19 on the Activities of Bank Employees in Conakry in 2021. *Central African Journal of Public Health*. Vol. 9, No. 4, 2023, pp. 113-116. doi: 10.11648/j.cajph.20230904.13

Received: July 24, 2023; Accepted: August 10, 2023; Published: August 22, 2023

Abstract: *Introduction:* COVID-19 is an emerging contagious disease caused by SARS-CoV-2 that appeared in China in December 2019. The exponential progression of this disease led the WHO to declare a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on January 30, 2020, which was requalified as a pandemic on March 11, 2021. This unprecedented global health crisis has affected all populations and all sectors of professional activity. It has affected business operations to varying degrees, with closures, layoffs, activity limitations, structural reorganizations and the promotion of home working (telecommuting) to limit the spread of the virus. *Methodology:* This was a descriptive and analytical cross-sectional study lasting seven (07) months from November 25, 2020 to June 27, 2021. Eighteen banks in the city of Conakry were targeted for the study. *Results:* This descriptive and analytical cross-sectional study was carried out in thirteen (13) bank head offices located in the commune of Kaloum over a 7-month period from November 25, 2020 to June 27, 2021. Of the 2,500 bank employees, only 875 consented to the study, representing a 35% participation rate. 62.1% of bankers versus 18.6% teleworked, and 55.8% of employees claimed to be overworked. *Conclusion:* the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the banking sector, with COVID-19 prevalence at 20.9% and absenteeism at 13.6%. Shift work was the predominant mode of work for 62.1% of bankers, compared with 18.6% teleworking, and 55.8% of employees claimed to be overworked. In addition, 67.6% of bankers had a good attitude and knowledge of COVID-19, and 9.9% of bankers consented to COVID-19 vaccination. Non-respect of physical distancing by employees during breaks, meetings or group work, absence of distancing markings for customers, absence of disinfection, hugging and contact time with customers were the factors impacting COVID-19 transmission in the banking environment.

Keywords: COVID-19, Banking Activities, Influence, Conakry

1. Introduction

COVID-19 is an emerging contagious disease caused by SARS-CoV-2 that appeared in China in December 2019. The exponential progression of this disease led the WHO to declare a Public Health Emergency of International Concern on January 30, 2020, which was requalified as a pandemic on March 11, 2020 [1].

This unprecedented global health crisis has affected all populations and all sectors of professional activity. It has affected business operations to varying degrees, with closures, redundancies, activity limitations, structural reorganizations and the promotion of home working (telecommuting) to limit the spread of the virus [2].

The immediate consequence was the paralysis of all sectors of activity, with drastic measures affecting key sectors of the economy such as the financial institutions considered vital to every country. The banking sector was one of the hardest hit, with staff forced to work despite the threat of contracting the virus [3].

In 2020, the International Labour Organization (ILO) reported a loss of around 125 million full-time jobs, 82% teleworking, 63% flexible working hours and 82% wearing PPE during COVID-19. However, in 2021, the ILO also cited a 4.7% reduction in total hours worked compared to the start of the pandemic, a job loss of around 137 million and a stagnant recovery with 1.5% financial activity [4].

In Europe, ÖZLEM DH et al [8] reported in 2021 that higher exposure to COVID-19 led to a relative increase in lending among

the least well-capitalized banks, while their better-capitalized peers reduced lending more.

In China, LIU K *et al* in 2020 reported a 6.8% fall in GDP in the first quarter and an increase in the urban unemployment rate from 5.9% to 6.2% among banks [5].

In Africa, NJATANG DK in 2021 reported a drop in GDP in low-income countries with -3.3% in Congo; - 3.1% in Mali and - 0.13% in Ghana [6].

In Morocco, EZZAHRA EKF, in a study for the People's Central Bank, reported a 12.7% rise in unemployment in 2021, an 11% fall in bank loans granted, compared with 2.4% in deposits, and an 8.5% fall in GNP [7].

Like other countries, the Republic of Guinea was confronted with the COVID-19 pandemic, where the first case was declared on March 12, 2020. A state of health emergency was declared on March 26, with restrictive sanitary measures taken to limit the spread of the virus. This led to the disruption of socio-economic activities [8].

It is in this context that we initiated this study, the general objective of which was to study the influence of COVID-19 on banking activities in Conakry in 2021.

2. Methodology

Study setting: the head offices of 8 banks located in the commune of Kaloum served as the setting for our study.

These were:

1. AFRILAND First Bank
2. Banque pour le Commerce et l'Industrie (BCI)
3. Central Bank of the Republic of Guinea (BCRG)
4. Banque Internationale pour le Commerce et l'Industrie de la Guinée (BICIGUI)
5. Islamic Bank of Guinea (BIG)
6. Banque de Developpement de Guinée (BDG)
7. Banque Sahélo-saharienne pour l'Investissement et le Commerce (BSI)
8. The Pan African bank (ECOBANK)

2.1. Material

Data from the banks' financial statement records (transactions, deposits, loans, foreign transfers and GNP) for the years 2020 and 2021; records of work organization in the banks during containment and decontainment constituted our study material.

2.2. Methods

Study duration: This was a descriptive and analytical cross-sectional study lasting seven (07) months from November 25, 2020 to June 27, 2021.

Selection criteria:

Inclusion criteria: data from the 8 selected banks were included.

Non-inclusion criteria: data from other banks not selected were not included.

Study variables: our variables were qualitative and quantitative and included.

Socio-professional data: Age - Sex- Bank employee- Job position -Seniority at job position -Marital status -Level of education.

Ethics and Deontology: the anonymity of bank employees was respected and their informed consent was requested. Confidentiality was respected. The data collected was used for scientific purposes only.

3. Results

Table 1. Distribution of employees by socio-professional data.

Socio-professional data	Number (N=875)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	577	65,9
Female	298	34,1
Sex-ratio: 1,9		
Age range		
22-31	243	22,8
32-41	365	41,7
42-51	170	19,4
52-61	85	9,7
≥ 62	12	1,4
Marital status		
single	220	25,1
Divorced	20	2,3
Maried	625	71,4
widowed	10	1,1

Table 2. Distribution of work organization among employees during COVID-19.

Organization (employees)	Confinement	Déconfinement
Work modes		
Shift work	616 (70,4%)	35 (4%)
Temporary work	107 (12,3%)	36 (4,1%)
Telecommuting	263 (29,8%)	29 (3,3%)
Face to face	99 (11,3%)	825 (94,3%)
workload		
Overload and overtime	52 (5,9%)	575 (65,7%)
Réduced work	167 (19,1%)	38 (4,3%)
employee/customer contact	>15 min	>15 min

Table 3. Distribution of employees according to preventive measures adopted.

Préventive measures	number (n=875)	Oui (%)	Non (%)
Hand hygiene	837 (95,7)		38 (4,3)
Mandatory mask	835 (95,4)		40 (4,6)
Physical distance	640 (73,1)		235 (26,9)
Knowledge of COVID19 signs	741 (84,7)		134 (15,3)
Hygiène of premises	260 (29,7)		615 (70,3)
Pronged contact with public	517 (59,1)		358 (40,9)
COVID-19 vaccination	87 (9,9)		788 (90,1)
Availability of closed waste garbage cans	256 (29,3)		679 (70,7)

Table 4. Psychosocial experiences of bank employees during COVID-19.

feelings	Number (N=875)	Percentage (%)
fear	307	35,1
Stress	115	13,1
Anxiéty	72	8,2
Stigma	180 recovered from COVID-19	20,6
none	200	22,9
Psychotherapy	149	17,0

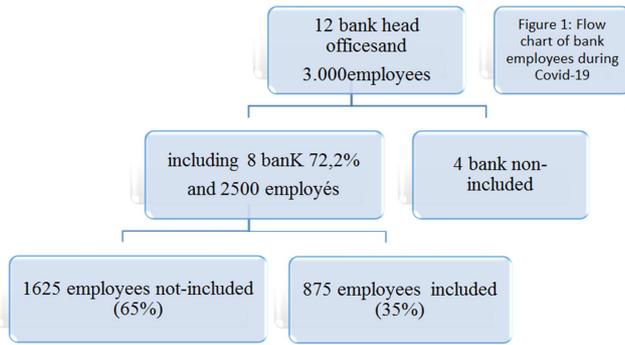


Figure 1. Flow chart of bank employees during COVID-19.

4. Discussion

All banks reduced their workforce by 30% during the pandemic; the number of employees/office varied from 1 to 4; daily work was 4H during containment and 7H during decontainment. During containment, 70.4% of bank employees worked on shifts, and 12.3% worked on temporary shifts.

29.8% of bank employees teleworked during confinement. ÖZEN E et al [9] in Turkey in 2021 reported that 46.8% of bank workers teleworked during COVID-19. The work system is centralized in our banks, and only a few managers teleworked.

In addition, 19.1% of bank employees had a reduced workload during containment, and 65.7% felt they were overworked during decontainment.

Our study reveals a reduction in bank transactions and foreign transfers of -35 to -40% and -25 to -30% respectively in 2020 compared with 2019, while they remain stable in 2021. BROWN R et al [10] in the UK in 2020 reported a significant decline in banking activity. Transaction volumes fell from April to May 2020.

An increase in ATM withdrawals was reported during the pandemic. This increased use of ATMs is thought to be due to the prioritization of this means of payment, enabling a reduction in contact time between employees and the population in order to limit the spread of COVID-19.

However, loans and deposits increased by +15 to 20% and +12.8 to 18.6% respectively in 2020, and fell by -8 to -13% in 2021. BARUA B et al [11] in Bangladesh in 2020 reported a 33.1% increase in bank lending during containment. As for GRIEDER T et al [12] in Canada in May 2021, they reported an increase in bank lending by businesses during the pandemic. Similarly XIE H et al [13] in Asia in August 2021 reported that return on assets in banks is negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic as banks are exposed to a wide variety of risks compared to other financial institutions. The increase in loans and deposits recorded in 2020 is explained by the inadequacy of bank easing measures and the increase in mining and gold exports in Q3 2019, the benefits of which spill over into Q1 and Q2 2020, while the decline in 2021 is due to the temporary closure of mining and gold extraction sites during the containment period.

In addition, the year 2020 saw a significant drop in NBI of

-15 to -20%, and was classified as an "exceptional year" due to the banking easing measures during COVID-19; while a significant reduction in NBI of -7.5 to -13.2% was noted in 2021 among banks. BENSGHIR A et al [14] in Morocco in January 2021 reported a fairly significant drop in NBI of -30.7% and overall net income (RNG) of -56.3% in banks. In addition, NACIRI R [15] in Morocco in 2020 reported that sales were down 6.6% compared with the end of June 2019 at Saham Assurance. Reduced investment by multinationals during COVID-19 was an obstacle to the promotion of banking activities.

Hand hygiene was most respected by 95.7%, with a majority frequency of more than 3 times a day among 69.6% of employees. 90.8% preferred hydro-alcoholic gel and 34.2% handwashing with soap. The fact that hands are the main vector for the spread of SARS-COV2, and employees' preference for hydroalcoholic gel, would explain our result.

Physical distancing was often observed by 73.1% of bank employees. YASMIN S et al [15] in Bangladesh in January 2021 reported that 58.9% of bankers always maintained social distance. For work reasons, employees.

5. Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the banking sector, with COVID-19 prevalence at 20.9% and absenteeism at 13.6%. Shift work was the predominant mode of work for 62.1% of bankers, compared with 18.6% teleworking, and 55.8% of employees claimed to be overworked.

In addition, 67.6% of bankers had a good attitude and knowledge of COVID-19, and 9.9% of bankers consented to COVID-19 vaccination.

Non-respect of physical distancing by employees during breaks, meetings or group work, absence of distancing markings for customers, absence of disinfection, hugging and contact time with customers were the factors impacting COVID-19 transmission in the banking environment.

Psychological feelings were dominated by the fear of being contaminated by coronavirus 2 in 55.8% of cases; 8.2% by anxiety and 13.1% by mental stress. Hence the importance of psychotherapy in preventing psychosocial risks in this professional environment.

This crisis has posed a major threat to the survival of banks in developing economies with weak financial systems.

As a result, it is vital to strengthen support measures in order to contribute to economic recovery.

List of Abbreviations

- AGP: Aerosol Generating Procedures
- ANSS: Agence Nationale de Sécurité Sanitaire
- ARN: Ribo Nucleic Acid
- BBC: British Broadcasting Corporation
- BCRG: Central Bank of the Republic of Guinea
- US CDC: United State Center for Disease Control and Prevention

Coll: collaborater
 COVID-19: Coronavirus Disease 2019
 CTPI: Center for First-line Treatment
 DAF: Chief Financial Officer
 DRH: Director of Human Resources
 EPC: Equipement de Protection Collective
 EPI: Equipement de Protection Individuelle
 FSTS: Faculty of Health Sciences and Techniques
 FGPE: Fonds de Garantie des Prêts aux Entreprises
 (Business Loan Guarantee Fund)
 GIE: Economic Interest Grouping
 MLESTT: Interferon Factor Médecine Légale, d'Etique, de Santé au Travail et de Toxicologie (Forensic Medicine, Ethics, Occupational Health and Toxicology)
 N-Cov2: New Coronavirus 2
 ILO: International Labor Organization
 WHO: World Health Organization
 GDP: Gross Domestic Product
 SME: Small and Medium Enterprise
 GNP: Net Banking Product
 R-T-PCR: Reverse Transcriptase Protein C Reactiv
 SARS-COV2: SNST Severe Acute Respiratory
 Syndrom-Related Coronavirus 2
 SST: Service de Santé au Travail

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