

COVID-19 and Comorbidities in Douala, Cameroon

ABSTRACT

Aims: Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) still negatively impacting world populations. This study aimed at determining the prevalence of COVID-19 and comorbidities, and evaluating the impact of these comorbidities on COVID-19 patients.

Study design: Cross-sectional hospital-based study.

Place and Duration of Study: From January to March 2022, the present study was conducted at four health facilities of Douala town (Littoral Region, Cameroon).

Methodology: Anthropometric, bioimpedance, physiological, blood and nasopharyngeal samples were used for diagnosing COVID-19, hepatitis B virus, diabetes, obesity and hypertension. SARS-CoV-2 genome were detected by retrotranscriptase quantitative polymerase chain reaction. Data were analyzed with StatView v5 and GraphPad v5.03 software, and statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Results: A total of 178 patients, 139 Cameroonian and 39 foreigners, were finally included in the study. Lower COVID-19 vaccination coverage was seen in Cameroonians compared to foreigners (25.2% vs 43.6%, $P = .02$). No COVID-19 infection cases were found. The overall prevalence of diabetes, hypertension, obesity and HBV was 11.2%, 17.9%, 28.1% and 36.5%, respectively. Nearly 35% of patients were diagnosed with at least two of these comorbidities that significantly impacted on anthropometric, bioimpedance and physiological parameters. The risk of past COVID-infection was increased by 1.06 (95%CI 1.00 – 1.10, $P = .03$) and 2.81 (95%CI 1.65 – 5.77, $P = .04$) with one-unit increase in age and BMI, respectively. In contrast, risk of past COVID-19 infection was decreased by 94% (AOR = 0.06, 95%CI 0.01 – 0.76, $P = .03$) in foreigners compared to Cameroonians.

Conclusion: This study outlines the importance to manage comorbidities in context of COVID-19 in Cameroon. Further studies should be conducted to more documented about their epidemiology and impact on natural history of COVID-19 in the country.

Keywords: COVID-19; comorbidities; prevalence; interaction; Cameroon.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the first cases of novel coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) reported in China, the disease has spread incredibly fast to other regions of the world, and has become a pandemic within a few weeks [1]. The disease is caused by virus called severe acute respiratory syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) which belongs to Coronaviridae family [2]. More than 200 countries are still hit by the COVID-19 at varying levels, the disease is declining in some countries while increasing or rebounding in others. The latest statistics indicate that COVID-19 disproportionately affects the different parts of the globe, with highest morbidity and mortality rates seen in the Americas and Europe while lowest burden is seen

in areas including sub-Saharan Africa (sSA) countries. In Cameroon, COVID-19 was responsible for ~120000 cases and ~2000 deaths since the onset of the pandemic through the world (<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>), and available data indicate a high circulation of SARS-CoV-2 in some towns of the country .

Natural history of COVID-19 is complex, diverse and shaped by a cocktail of factors related to human host, virus and environment, with clinical spectrum ranging from asymptomatic carriage to potentially deadly severe complication [3]. Along with the pulmonary effects of COVID-19, several reports have indicated multiorgan involvement such as gastrointestinal, cardiovascular, and neurologic manifestations in patients who have contracted the virus [3]. A large number of risk factors associated with viral shedding, severe complications and death of the disease, and these include mainly advanced age, comorbidities such as diabetes, obesity and cardiovascular disorders [4–7].

Even though reports point out increasing burden of the above mentioned comorbidities in sSA countries, very few studies on COVID-19 and the role of these comorbidities have been conducted in the continent especially in Cameroon [8–11]. Diabetes and hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection are increasing documented at significant rates in African populations, and few studies outlined increased risk of COVID-related complications and death in African patients suffering from diabetes and chronic HBV infection [9,12,13]. In the present study, we determined the prevalence of COVID-19 and comorbidities (obesity, diabetes, HBV and hypertension), and evaluated the impact of these comorbidities on COVID-19 patients attending health facilities of the town of Douala, Cameroon.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

2.1 Study design

This was hospital-based prospective cross sectional study carried out in the town of Douala, Littoral region, Cameroon. Convenient sampling was used to recruit participants attending the Clinical Biology laboratory of the hospitals, and thereafter aims and objectives of the study were explained to each patient. A doc questionnaire form was administered to each included participant to document sociodemographic and clinical information. Anthropometric and physiological measurements were made on each participant while blood and nasopharyngeal sample collection was performed for glycaemia, HBV and COVID-19 screening, respectively.

2.2 Study sites

From January to March 2022, the present study was conducted at four health facilities of Douala town (Littoral Region, Cameroon) namely Nylon district hospital (NDH), Deido district hospital (DDH), Bangé district hospital (BDH), and Bonassama district hospital (BoDH). These hospitals receive a high frequency of patients coming for different health reasons, and this guided the choice of these hospitals as study sites.

2.3 Study population

Participants included in the study were of both sexes, aged > 18 years old, coming for COVID-19 test, having COVID-19 infection history, and willing to participate in the study by signing informed consent form. Conversely, patients having declined to participate and those in whom blood collection was impossible were excluded from the study.

2.4 Data collection

A structured questionnaire form was used to document participants' characteristics. The first section of the questionnaire captured sociodemographic information included age, nationality, educational level, residence area, marital status, occupation. Anthropometric (weight, height, body mass index – BMI) and impedance (muscle mass, body and visceral adipose tissues & water) data were captured in the second part of the questionnaire. The third part was focused on past and current comorbidities such as hypertension, diabetes, respiratory and cardiovascular disorders, and infections such as malaria, human immunodeficiency virus and HBV. The last two parts captured information on COVID-19 infection history and COVID-19 vaccination & treatment details. After collection of the information, blood and nasopharyngeal samples were collected and transported to the Clinical Virology department of Douala Laquintinie hospital for HBV and COVID-19 tests.

2.5 Anthropometric parameters

Weight (W) and height (H) were measured using a digital scale and standard measuring tape, respectively. These two parameters were used to compute BMI (Kg/m^2) using the Quetelet's formula: $\text{BMI} = W/H^2$. Bioelectrical impedance parameters (lean body mass, bone mass, water content, body fat and visceral adipose tissue) were measured using a smart wireless body fat scale coupled with an Android 11.1.1 smartphone. Each patient took off their shoes and climbed on the scale which thereafter send a low intensity and frequency electrical impulse (10-100 KHz) through the body in order to measure the resistance/impedance of tissues. Results were transferred to the smartphone for analysis using the New iwellness application v3.0.

2.6 Physiological parameters

Systolic and diastolic blood pressures (SBP and DBP) were measured three times in patients with no history of hypertension and the arithmetic mean of SBP/DBP readings was used. SBP and DBP were measured once in those with documented hypertension. Diagnostic of pre-hypertension and hypertension was performed by cardiologists of the health facilities. Fasting glycaemia were further measured twice for patients with hyperglycemia, the two measurement were two-week spaced. If hyperglycemia was still detected, glycated hemoglobin (HbA1c) was determined to diagnose diabetes as per standard methods.

2.7 Diabetes, HBV and COVID-19 status

Glycaemia was determined based on fresh whole blood analysis using a rapid blood glucose meter (ViVaCheck™ Ino Biotech, Hangzhou, China). Blood samples were collected by venipuncture using sterile syringes and then stored at -4°C in a fridge, 16 hours on average, until laboratory procedures. Blood samples were centrifuged (CWS 4236 A centrifuge) at 3000 rpm for 10 minutes and thereafter aliquoted in Eppendorf tubes. Sera samples were stored at -20°C until diagnosis of HBV infection is performed. Diagnosis of HBV was based on the detection of HBV antigens using ELISA test (URIT-660 microplate reader, URIT Medical Electronics, Co, Ltd, Guangxi, China). Results were expressed as valid (negative and positive) or invalid. Nasopharyngeal swabs were used for detecting SARS-CoV-2 infections among patients. Viral genome was detected by retrotranscriptase quantitative polymerase chain reaction (RT-qPCR) analysis of the *ORF1a* and *N* genes using a QuantStudio™ 7 real time thermocycler (Applied Biosystems, Massachusetts, USA). Cycle threshold (Ct) value of RT-qPCR was used to determine SARS-CoV-2 viremia.

2.8 Operational definitions

- Based on BMI analysis, patients were categorized as underweight ($<18.5 \text{ Kg/m}^2$), normal ($18.5 - 24.9 \text{ Kg/m}^2$), overweight ($25.0 - 29.9 \text{ Kg/m}^2$), obese ($30.0 - 34.9 \text{ Kg/m}^2$), and morbid obese ($\geq 35 \text{ Kg/m}^2$) [14].
- Patients were grouped as positive, negative and doubtful based on test result for HBV infection.
- Normotensive patients were those with SBP $<120 \text{ mmHg}$ and DBP $<80 \text{ mmHg}$ with no antihypertensive medication taking. Pre-hypertension was defined as having SBP of $120-139 \text{ mmHg}$ and/or DBP of $80-89 \text{ mmHg}$. Grade 1 hypertension was defined as SBP of $140-159 \text{ mmHg}$ and/or DBP of $90-99 \text{ mmHg}$ while grade 2 or 3 hypertension was defined as SBP $\geq 160 \text{ mmHg}$ and/or DBP $\geq 100 \text{ mmHg}$ and/or use of antihypertensive medication in the past two weeks [15].
- Fasting and post-prandial hyperglycemia were defined as blood glucose levels $\geq 1.26 \text{ g/dL}$ and $\geq 2 \text{ g/dL}$, respectively.
- Diabetes was defined as HbA1c $\geq 6.5\%$. The diagnostic of diabetes was made by endocrinology specialists of health facilities included in the study.
- Patients with a Ct value < 37 for RT-qPCR was considered negative for COVID-19 infection.

2.9 Ethical statements

This study was carried out according to the guidelines for human experimental models in clinical research as stated by the Cameroon Ministry of Public Health. Ethical and administrative clearances were issued by the ethics committees of the University of Douala (N° 2924 CEI-UDo/10/2021/M), Littoral health regional delegation (N° 1328/AAR/MINSANTE/DRSPL/BCASS), and Douala Laquintinie Hospital (N° 06713/AR/MINSANTE/DHL). The aim and objectives of the study were explained to participants in the language they understood best (French or English), and their questions were answered. Only patient who signed an informed consent form for their participation were enrolled. Participation in the study was strictly voluntary and patients were free to decline answering any question or totally withdraw if they so wished at any time.

2.10 Statistical analysis

Data were keyed in an Excel spreadsheet, coded, verified for consistency and then analyzed with StatView v5.0 (SAS Institute, Chicago, Inc., IL, USA) and GraphPad v5.03 (GraphPad PRISM, San Diego, Inc., CA, USA) software. Categorical and continuous variables were summarized as frequency, percentages with 95% confidence intervals (95%CI) and mean \pm standard deviation (SD). Pearson's chi square and Fisher's exact tests were used to compare proportions while Student, Mann-Whitney, and Kruskal-Wallis tests were to compare mean values between groups. Univariate and multivariate logistic regression analyses were used to identify determinants of COVID-19 infection. Quantification of COVID-

19 infection risk was made by computing crude and adjusted odds ratio (COR and AOR) and their 95% CIs. A p-value < 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Selection of the participants included in the study

Two hundred and seventy-three patients were approached in the different hospitals, and upon exclusion criteria 178 were finally included in the study as summarized in Fig. 1.

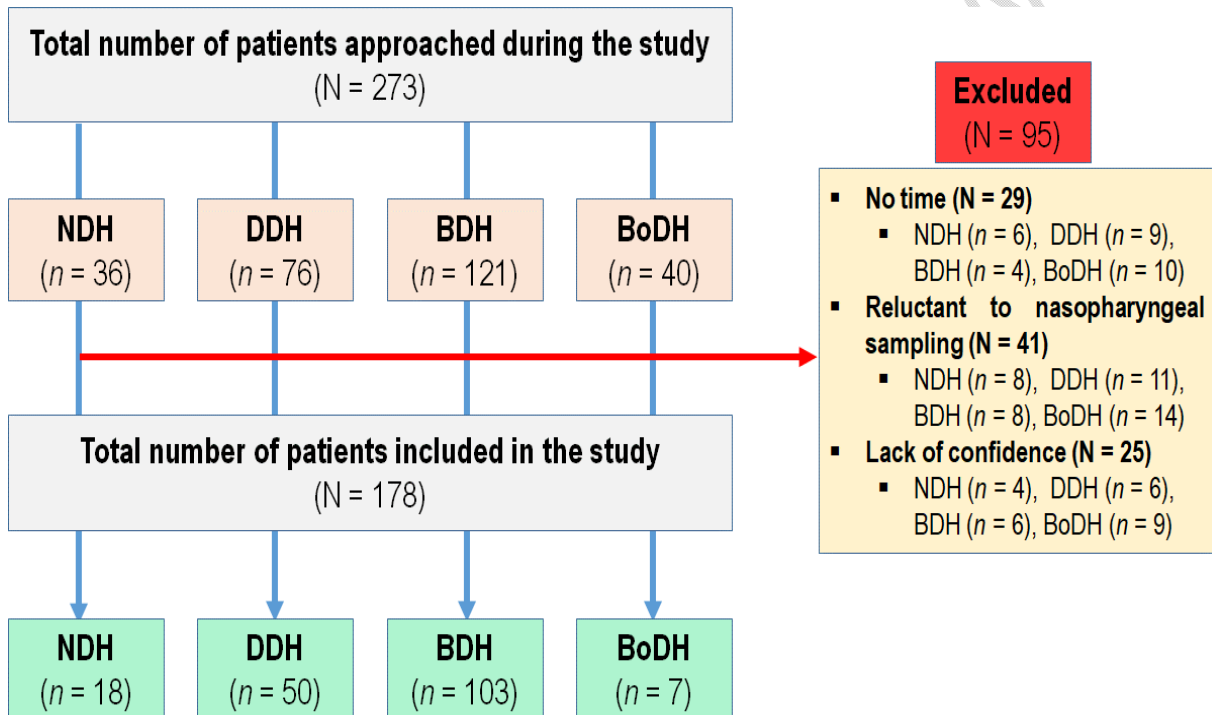


Fig. 1. Flow diagram depicting inclusion of patients

BDH: Bangue district hospital, BoDH: Bonassama district hospital, DDH: Deido district hospital, NDH: Nylon district hospital

3.2 Characteristics of the participants

Of the 178 participants, 139 and 39 were Cameroonian and foreigners, respectively. The analysis stratified by origin of the patients revealed that there statistically significant differences between these two groups for age, COVID-19 infection history and vaccination (Table 1). Foreigners were younger than Cameroonians with mean age \pm SD of 29.7 ± 11.5 years and 39.5 ± 13.3 ($P < .0001$), respectively. Also, 80% of foreigners were aged 21 – 30 years. The proportion of patients with history of COVID-19 infection was higher in Cameroonians (18%) compared to foreigners (2.6%). In contrast, lower COVID-19

vaccination coverage was seen in Cameroonians compared to foreigners (25.2% vs 43.6%, $P = .02$) (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of the included participants by gender and age

Variables	Total (N = 178)		Cameroonian (n = 139)		Foreigners (n = 39)		P [#]
	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Gender							
Female	69	38.8	58	41.7	11	28.2	.14
Male	109	61.2	81	58.3	28	71.8	
Age (years)							
[21 - 30[	70	39.3	40	28.8	30	76.9	< .0001*
[30 - 40[	42	23.6	39	28.1	3	7.7	
[40 - 50[	29	16.3	27	19.4	2	5.1	
[50 - 60[	19	10.7	17	12.2	2	5.1	
[60 - 70[	11	6.2	10	7.2	1	2.6	
≥ 70	7	3.9	6	4.3	1	2.6	
History of COVID-19 infection?							
No	152	85.4	114	82.0	38	97.4	.01*
Yes	26	14.6	25	18.0	1	2.6	
Period of positive COVID-19 result							
1 month	3	11.5	3	12.3	0	0.0	.57
2 month	8	30.8	8	32.0	0	0.0	
3 month	9	34.6	8	32.0	1	100.0	
4 month	6	23.1	6	24.0	0	0.0	
COVID-19 vaccination?							
No	126	70.8	104	74.8	22	56.4	.02*
Yes	52	29.2	35	25.2	17	43.6	
HBV vaccination?							
No	168	94.4	131	94.2	37	94.9	.88
Yes	10	5.6	8	5.8	2	5.1	
COVID-19 vaccine							
None	126	70.8	104	74.8	22	56.4	.03*
AstraZeneca	7	3.9	7	5.0	0	0.0	
Johnson & Johnson	11	6.2	7	5.0	4	10.3	
Pfizer	20	11.2	13	9.4	7	17.9	

Sinopharm 14 7.9 8 5.8 6 15.4

Data are expressed as frequency (n) and percentage (%)

COVID-19: Coronavirus disease 2019, HBV: Viral hepatitis B

#Pearson chi square and Fisher's exact tests were used to compare the groups

*Statistically significant at $P < .05$

Likewise seen in Table 1, there were significant differences between Cameroonian and foreigners for BMI (Kg/m^2), glycaemia (g/dL), fatty mass (Kg), visceral adipose tissue (Kg) and water content (%) (Table 2). The first four parameters were significantly higher in Cameroonians compared to foreigners (e.g., 26.8 ± 4.4 vs 22.1 ± 4.1 for BMI, $P < .0001$). Water content (%) was on average lower in foreigners compared to their Cameroonian counterparts (53.11 ± 6.88 vs 47.91 ± 6.47 , $P < .0001$).

Table 2. Anthropometric, physiological and bioimpedance details of the participants

Parameters	Total (N = 178)	Cameroonian (n = 139)	Foreigners (n = 39)	P [#]
BMI (Kg/m^2)	25.8 ± 4.7	26.8 ± 4.4	22.1 ± 4.1	$< .0001^*$
Glycaemia (g/dL)	0.96 ± 0.28	0.99 ± 0.29	0.88 ± 0.21	.04*
SBP (mmHg)	123 ± 19	123 ± 18	123 ± 19	.98
DBP (mmHg)	76 ± 12	77 ± 13	77 ± 11	.91
Lean body mass (Kg)	48.9 ± 8.4	48.92 ± 9.77	48.89 ± 7.05	.98
Fatty mass (Kg)	27.5 ± 12.0	29.98 ± 10.83	18.65 ± 12.06	$< .0001^*$
Water content (%)	49.1 ± 6.9	47.91 ± 6.47	53.11 ± 6.88	$< .0001^*$
Bone mass (Kg)	2.70 ± 0.30	2.71 ± 0.33	2.59 ± 0.32	.06
Visceral adipose tissue (Kg)	9.80 ± 4.70	10.51 ± 4.89	7.21 ± 2.67	$< .0001^*$

Data are expressed as mean \pm standard deviation (SD)

BMI: Body mass index, SBP: Systolic blood pressure, DBP: Diastolic blood pressure

#Unpaired t-test was used to compare the groups

*Statistically significant at $P < .05$

3.3 Prevalence of HBV, diabetes, obesity, hypertension and COVID-19

On analysis, diabetes, hypertension and HBV were the diseases found along the patients. The overall prevalence of diabetes, hypertension, obesity and HBV infection was 11.2%, 17.9%, 28.1% and 36.5%, respectively. No COVID-19 infection cases were found using RT-qPCR in this study. Noted that 35% (7/20) and 58% (29/50) of patients with diabetes and hypertension were living with these diseases before their inclusion in the study. Thus, the prevalence of new cases for diabetes and hypertension was 7.3% (13/178, 95%CI 4.3 – 12.1%) and % (21/178, 95%CI 7.9 – 17.4%), respectively. Of the 117 patients diagnosed with one of the abovementioned diseases, 31 (26.5%) of them were suffering from two diseases (Table 3). In Fig. 2A, prevalence of obesity was significantly higher in Cameroonians compared to foreigners (21.6% vs 5.1%, $P < .0001$).

Table 3. Patterns of diseases seen in study participants

Diseases	n	%	95%CI
Overall prevalence ^a			

COVID-19	0	0.0	-
Diabetes	20	11.2	7.4 – 16.7
Obesity	32	17.9	13.0 – 24.3
Hypertension	50	28.1	22.0 – 35.1
HBV	65	36.5	29.8 – 43.8
Prevalence of diseases' association^b			
COVID-19	0	0.0	-
Diabetes	9	5.1	2.5 – 9.3
Obesity	11	6.2	3.5 – 10.7
Hypertension	18	10.2	6.5 – 15.4
HBV	39	21.9	16.5 – 28.5
Diabetes + HBV	1	0.5	0.1 – 3.1
Diabetes + Obesity	2	1.1	0.3 – 4.0
Diabetes + Hypertension	4	2.2	0.8 – 5.6
Obesity + HBV	5	2.8	1.2 – 6.4
Hypertension + Obesity	7	3.9	1.9 – 7.9
Hypertension + HBV	12	6.7	3.9 – 11.4
Diabetes + Hypertension + Obesity	1	0.5	0.1 – 3.1
Diabetes + Hypertension + HBV	2	1.1	0.3 – 4.0
Hypertension + Obesity + HBV	5	2.8	1.2 – 6.4
Diabetes + Hypertension + Obesity + HBV	1	0.5	0.1 – 3.1
Total number of infection type^c	117	65.7	58.5 – 72.3

Data are expressed as frequency (n) and percentage (%)

COVID-19: Coronavirus disease 2019, HBV: Viral hepatitis B, 95%CI: Confidence interval

^aPrevalence of each disease regardless status one another

^bPrevalence of each disease either alone or in association

^cDetermined by summing up the frequency and percentage presented in "b"

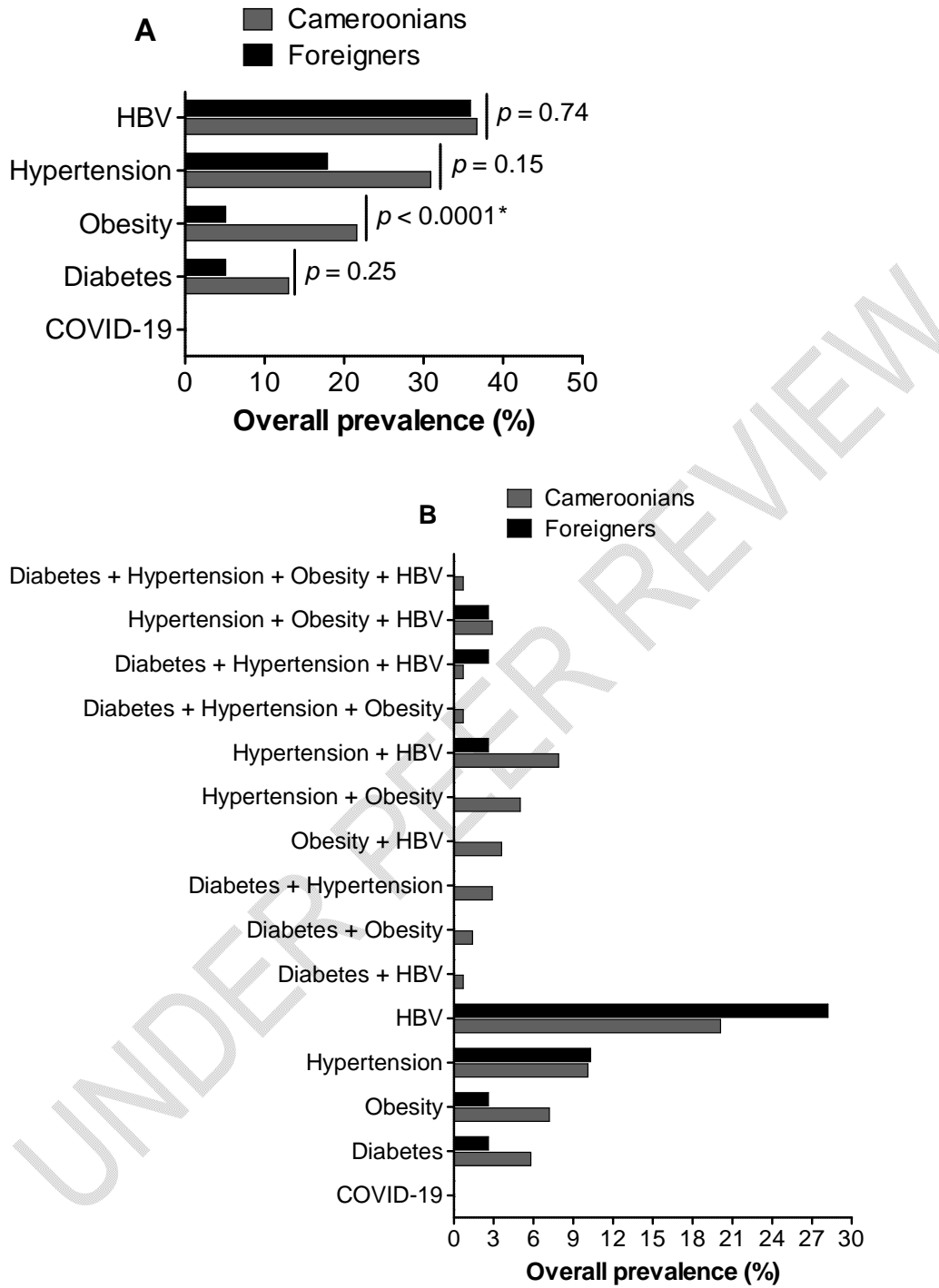


Fig. 2. Prevalence of comorbidities (A) and nature of the association (B) by ethnicity

Each bar represents percentage (%)

COVID-19: Coronavirus disease 2019, HBV: Viral hepatitis B

#Pearson chi square and Fisher's exact tests were used to compare the groups

*Statistically significant at $P < .05$

3.4 Prevalence of HBV, hypertension and diabetes by patients' details

In Table 4, prevalence rates of HBV, hypertension and diabetes stratified by characteristics of the patients are presented. The prevalence of HBV was significantly higher in patients with COVID-19 history compared to those without any past COVID-19 infection (46.2% vs 34.9%, $P = .001$). Hypertension burden gradually increased with age, and highest proportion was seen in those aged ≥ 70 years old (85.7%). Similarly, overweight and obese patients were most affected by hypertension with prevalence of 36.8% and 46.8%, respectively. The prevalence of diabetes was significantly higher in females compared to males (11.6% vs 5.5%, $P = .04$).

Table 4. Association of hepatitis B virus, hypertension and diabetes comorbidities with respect to patients' characteristics

Variables	N	HBV			Hypertension			Diabetes		
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>P</i>	<i>n</i>	%	<i>P</i>	<i>n</i>	%	<i>P</i>
Ethnicity										
Cameroonian	139	51	36.7	.74	43	30.9	.15	12	8.6	.25
Foreigner	39	14	35.9		7	17.9		2	5.1	
Gender										
Female	69	24	34.8	.88	16	23.2	.49	8	11.6	.04*
Male	109	41	37.6		34	31.2		6	5.5	
Age (years)										
[21 - 30[	70	22	31.4	.15	4	5.7	< .0001*	1	1.4	.07
[30 - 40[	42	20	47.6		9	21.4		5	11.9	
[40 - 50[	29	9	31.0		11	37.9		2	6.9	
[50 - 60[	19	8	42.1		12	63.2		2	10.5	
[60 - 70[	11	3	27.3		8	72.7		1	9.1	
≥ 70	7	3	42.9		6	85.7		3	42.9	
COVID-19 history										
No	152	53	34.9	.001*	44	28.9	.01*	14	9.2	.33
Yes	26	12	46.2		6	23.1		0	0.0	
BMI										
Underweight	8	3	37.5	.77	0	0.0	.008*	0	0.0	.46
Normal	70	29	41.4		11	15.7		3	4.3	
Overweight	68	22	32.4		25	36.8		9	13.2	
Obese	32	11	34.4		14	43.8		2	6.3	

Data are expressed as frequency (*n*) and percentage (%)

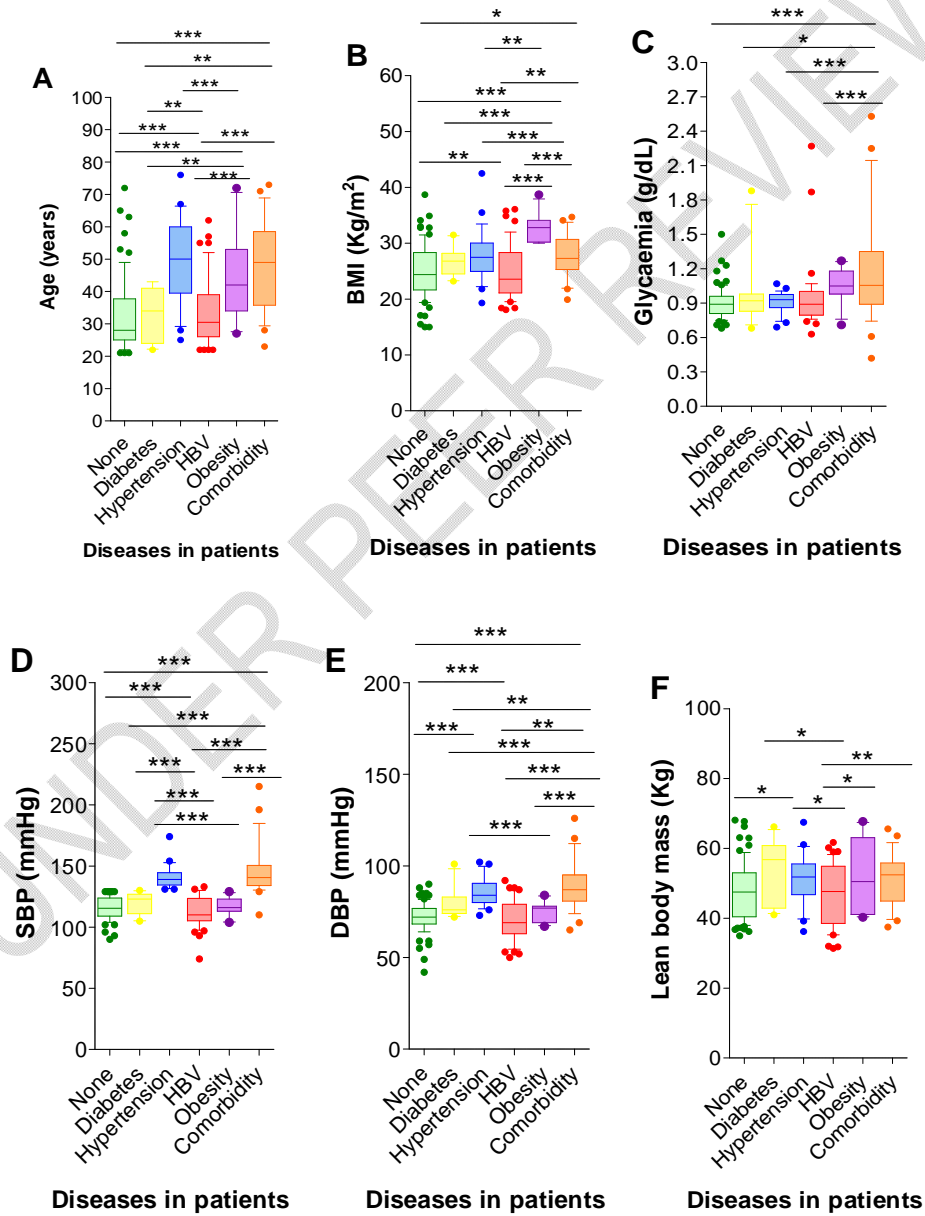
COVID-19: Coronavirus disease 2019, HBV: Hepatitis B virus

#Pearson chi square and Fisher's exact tests were used to compare the groups

*Statistically significant at $P < .05$

3.5 Mean variation of age, anthropometric, physiological and bioimpedance parameters by comorbidity status

The influence of comorbidity status on age, anthropometric, physiological and bioimpedance parameters are depicted Fig. 3A-J. Patients suffering from hypertension only were significantly older (Mean = 48.8 years old) and had higher BMI (Mean = 27.9 Kg/m²) than those without disease and those with diabetes or HBV (Fig. 3A & 3B). Glycaemia was higher in those diagnosed with at least two diseases with mean values of 1.21 g/dL (Fig. 3C). Not surprising as SBP and DBP values were significantly highest in patients with either hypertension alone or in association with other diseases (i.e., diabetes, HBV) (Fig. 2D & 2E). Fatty mass, bone mass and visceral adipose tissue values were highest in patients with obesity (Fig. 3F-J).



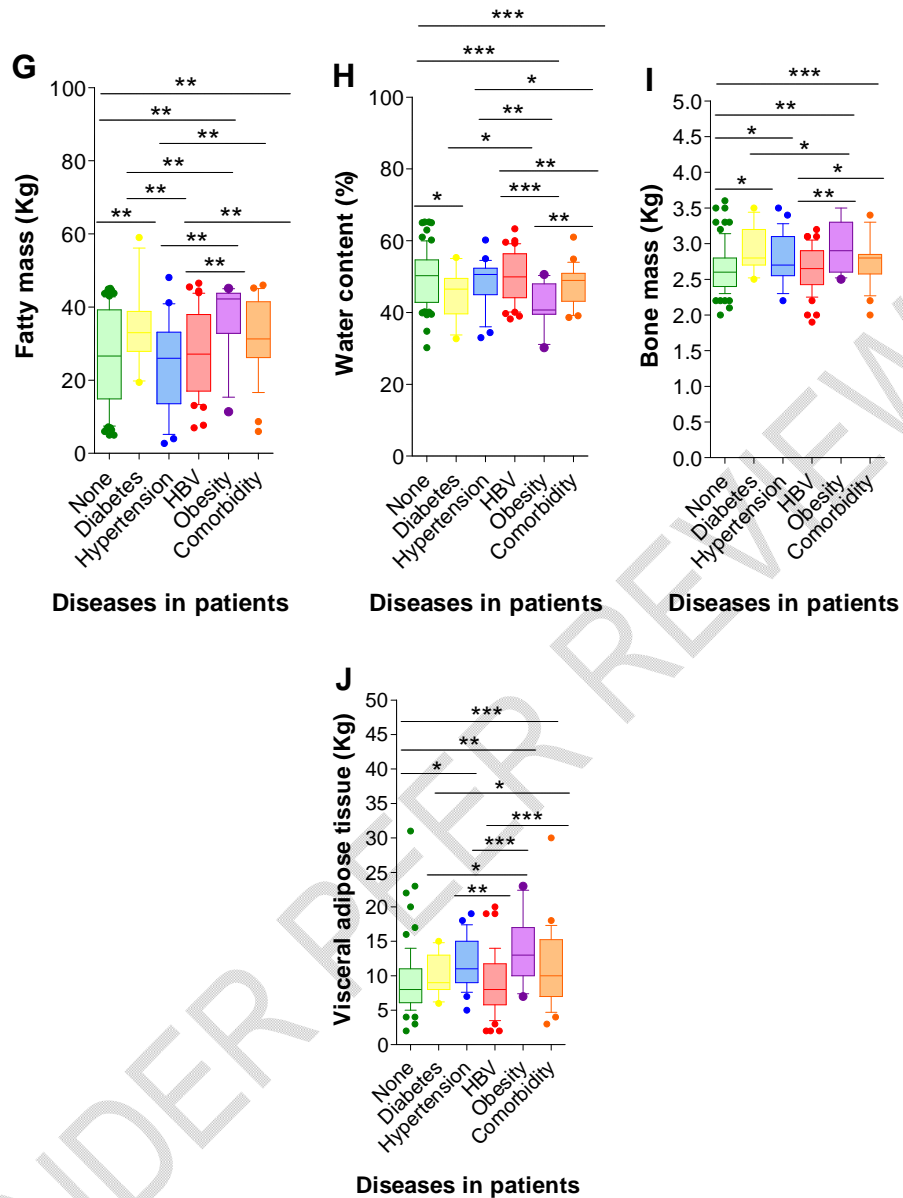


Fig. 3. Age (A), BMI (B), glycaemia (C), SBP (D), DBP (E), lean body mass (F), fatty mass (G), water content (H), bone mass (I) and visceral adipose tissue (J) by type of morbidity

BMI: Body mass index, DBP: Diastolic blood pressure, SBP: Systolic blood pressure

Comorbidity group consisted of patients with at least two comorbidities seen in the study

One-way ANOVA and Duncan's post hoc tests were used to make pairwise comparisons

Only statistically significant pairwise differences were plotted on the graphs

*Statistically significant at *P < .05, **P < .01, ***P < .001*

3.6 Impact of ethnicity and morbidity status on anthropometric, physiological and bioimpedance parameters

As presented in Table 5, Cameroonian patients diagnosed with hypertension only were significantly older with higher BMI than Cameroonian diagnosed with other diseases (i.e., diabetes, HBV, and comorbidities). Regarding foreigners, those with comorbidities were significantly older than their counterparts with other diseases. Both in Cameroonian and foreigners, SBP and DBP were significantly higher in patients with comorbidities: 139.2 ± 20.6 mmHg (Cameroonians) and 167.3 ± 41.6 mmHg (foreigners) for SBP, 85.2 ± 13.5 mmHg and 95.3 ± 26.6 mmHg for DBP (Table 5). Lean body mass was higher in comorbidity group compared to HBV only among Cameroonians while this parameter was higher in patients with comorbidities compared to those with no disease among foreigners.

When comparing Cameroonian to foreigners by stratifying for type of disease, we have noted that HBV-infected Cameroonians were significantly older, had higher BMI and fatty mass than HBV-infected foreigners (35.2 ± 10.4 vs 25.3 ± 1.7 , $P = .001$ for age, 24.5 ± 3.3 vs 20.9 ± 1.8 , $P = .001$ for BMI, 28.8 ± 10.6 and 17.7 ± 6.1 for fatty mass). In contrast, mean DBP values were significantly lower in HBV-infected foreigners compared to HBV-infected Cameroonians (68.6 ± 10.5 vs 75.7 ± 10.2 , $P = .03$). In hypertension group, only fatty mass and visceral adipose tissue were found to be significantly higher in Cameroonian compared to foreigners (25.4 ± 10.6 vs 10.2 ± 4.6 , $P = .00054$ for fatty mass, 11.79 ± 3.09 vs 7.50 ± 1.91 , $P = .009$ for visceral adipose tissue). In comorbidity group, no difference was found between Cameroonian and foreigners for all parameters analyzed.

3.7 Determinants of COVID-19 infection

Univariate and multivariate logistic regression analyses were performed to identify factors associated with COVID-19 infection history. On multivariate analysis, three factors were identified namely ethnicity, patient's age and BMI (Table 6). The chances of past COVID-infection were increased by 1.06 (95%CI 1.00 – 1.10, $P = .03$) and 2.81 (95%CI 1.65 – 5.77, $P = .04$) with one-unit increase in age and BMI, respectively. In contrast, risk of past COVID-19 infection was decreased by 94% (AOR = 0.06, 95%CI 0.01 – 0.76, $P = .03$) in foreigners compared to Cameroonians (Table 6).

Table 5. Influence of ethnicity and comorbidity status on parameters of the participants

Variables	Ethnicity	None	Comorbidity	Diabetes	Hypertension	Obesity	HBV
Age (years)	Cameroonian	32.5 ± 9.4 ^{ac}	47.2 ± 13.5 ^b	32.0 ± 8.1 ^c	47.3 ± 13.8 ^b	47.1 ± 14.0 ^b	35.2 ± 10.4 ^{ac}
	Foreigners	25.3 ± 6.2 ^{ac}	52.3 ± 12.5 ^b	38.0 ± 0.0 ^{abc}	44.7 ± 16.4 ^b	30.0 ± 0.0 ^{abc}	25.3 ± 1.7 ^c
	<i>P</i> [#]	.0006*	.55	n.a	.51	n.a	.001*
BMI (Kg/m ²)	Cameroonian	24.7 ± 3.3 ^a	29.8 ± 4.6 ^b	25.9 ± 1.9 ^a	26.3 ± 2.2 ^a	32.6 ± 2.7 ^c	24.5 ± 3.3 ^a
	Foreigners	21.3 ± 4.3 ^a	26.9 ± 5.2 ^b	26.6 ± 0.0 ^{abc}	24.4 ± 4.4 ^{abc}	32.8 ± 0.0 ^{abc}	20.9 ± 1.8 ^{ac}
	<i>P</i> [#]	< .0001*	.77	n.a	.09	n.a	.0014*
Glycaemia (g/dL)	Cameroonian	0.90 ± 0.12 ^a	1.12 ± 0.40 ^b	0.88 ± 0.89 ^a	0.89 ± 0.07 ^a	1.04 ± 0.16 ^{ab}	1.00 ± 0.33 ^{ab}
	Foreigners	0.83 ± 0.09 ^a	1.12 ± 0.20 ^b	1.88 ± 0.00 ^{abc}	0.89 ± 0.10 ^c	1.05 ± 0.00 ^{abc}	0.83 ± 0.09 ^c
	<i>P</i> [#]	.003*	.76	n.a	.73	n.a	.09
SBP (mmHg)	Cameroonian	114.9 ± 10.4 ^a	139.2 ± 20.6 ^b	117.9 ± 9.2 ^a	139.1 ± 8.4 ^b	117.0 ± 8.3 ^a	110.8 ± 12.9 ^a
	Foreigners	116.7 ± 7.6 ^a	167.3 ± 41.6 ^b	126.0 ± 0.0 ^{abc}	139.0 ± 2.9 ^c	116.0 ± 0.0 ^{abc}	117.5 ± 10.4 ^a
	<i>P</i> [#]	.55	.11	n.a	.69	n.a	.11
DBP (mmHg)	Cameroonian	70.6 ± 9.4 ^{ac}	85.2 ± 13.5 ^b	77.3 ± 5.4 ^{ab}	85.6 ± 8.9 ^b	75.20 ± 5.8 ^{ac}	68.6 ± 10.5 ^c
	Foreigners	72.8 ± 5.8 ^a	95.3 ± 26.6 ^b	83.0 ± 0.0 ^{ab}	82.8 ± 5.9 ^{ab}	72.0 ± 0.0 ^{ab}	75.7 ± 10.2 ^a
	<i>P</i> [#]	.57	.43	n.a	.39	n.a	.03*
Lean body mass (Kg)	Cameroonian	46.7 ± 8.0 ^a	51.8 ± 7.3 ^b	51.4 ± 9.4 ^{ab}	51.3 ± 8.7 ^{ab}	52.8 ± 10.7 ^b	45.2 ± 8.9 ^c
	Foreigners	47.7 ± 6.4 ^a	56.6 ± 5.5 ^b	58.0 ± 0.0 ^{ab}	49.7 ± 3.4 ^{ab}	40.8 ± 0.0 ^{ab}	47.9 ± 8.4 ^{ab}
	<i>P</i> [#]	.92	.21	n.a	.61	n.a	.64
Fatty mass (Kg)	Cameroonian	27.5 ± 11.5 ^{ac}	33.2 ± 9.2 ^{bc}	31.7 ± 8.9 ^{abc}	25.4 ± 10.6 ^c	36.7 ± 10.1 ^b	28.8 ± 10.6 ^c
	Foreigners	17.5 ± 10.7 ^{ab}	27.4 ± 19.2 ^a	59.0 ± 0.0 ^{ab}	10.2 ± 4.6 ^b	45.1 ± 0.0 ^{ab}	17.7 ± 6.1 ^a
	<i>P</i> [#]	.0003*	.45	n.a	.005*	n.a	.0007*
Water content (%)	Cameroonian	48.9 ± 6.7 ^a	45.6 ± 6.6 ^b	46.9 ± 6.3 ^{bc}	49.9 ± 3.5 ^c	42.8 ± 4.9 ^b	49.1 ± 6.0 ^{ac}
	Foreigners	52.9 ± 7.9 ^a	49.1 ± 4.0 ^a	40.9 ± 0.0 ^a	53.9 ± 4.7 ^a	30.2 ± 0.0 ^a	56.5 ± 5.2 ^a

	<i>P</i> [#]	.02*	.65	n.a	.07	n.a	.001*
Bone mass (Kg)	Cameroonian	2.61 ± 0.29 ^{ac}	2.82 ± 0.29 ^{bc}	2.86 ± 0.33 ^b	2.76 ± 0.37 ^{abc}	2.98 ± 0.39 ^b	2.57 ± 0.32 ^c
	Foreigners	2.47 ± 0.26 ^a	3.00 ± 0.43 ^b	2.70 ± 0.00 ^{ab}	2.65 ± 0.50 ^{ab}	2.60 ± 0.00 ^{ab}	2.69 ± 0.26 ^{ab}
	<i>P</i> [#]	.01*	.18	n.a	.41	n.a	.61
Visceral adipose tissue (Kg)	Cameroonian	9.36 ± 4.84 ^a	12.67 ± 5.23 ^b	9.38 ± 2.45 ^{ab}	11.79 ± 3.09 ^{ab}	13.60 ± 4.96 ^b	7.96 ± 4.00 ^c
	Foreigners	7.03 ± 2.68 ^a	10.13 ± 3.55 ^a	8.20 ± 0.00 ^{ab}	7.50 ± 1.91 ^{ab}	17.00 ± 0.00 ^{ab}	6.56 ± 2.58 ^b
	<i>P</i> [#]	.01*	.71	n.a	.009*	n.a	.09

Data are expressed as mean ± standard deviation (SD)

BMI: Body mass index, SBP: Systolic blood pressure, DBP: Diastolic blood pressure, n.a: Not applicable

Comorbidity group consisted of patients with at least two comorbidities seen in the study

[#]Unpaired t-test was used to compare the groups

One-way ANOVA and Duncan's post hoc tests were used to make pairwise comparisons. For a same line, the values with the same letter are not statistically significant at $P < .05$

*Statistically significant at $P < .05$

Table 6. Factors associated with COVID-19 infection history

Factors	Univariate analysis		Multivariate analysis	
	COR (95%CI)	P	AOR (95%CI)	P
Ethnicity				
Cameroonian	1		1	
Foreigner	0.12 (0.02 - 0.92)	.04*	0.06 (0.01 - 0.76)	.03*
Gender				
Female	1		1	
Male	1.02 (0.43 - 2.39)	.97	0.65 (0.18 - 2.38)	.51
Age (years)	1.02 (0.99 - 1.05)	.11	1.06 (1.00 - 1.10)	.03*
BMI (Kg/m²)	1.04 (0.95 - 1.13)	.44	2.81 (1.65 - 5.77)	.04*
Glycaemia (g/dL)	0.80 (0.16 - 3.91)	.78	0.27 (0.04 - 1.92)	.19
Lean body mass (Kg)	1.03 (0.98 - 1.09)	.22	1.19 (0.98 - 1.44)	.07
Fatty mass (Kg)	1.02 (0.98 - 1.06)	.32	1.02 (0.93 - 1.11)	.65
Bone mass (Kg)	2.19 (0.65 - 7.34)	.21	0.16 (0.01 - 8.41)	.36
Water content (%)	0.97 (0.91 - 1.03)	.33	0.90 (0.80 - 1.02)	.10
Visceral adipose tissue (Kg)	1.03 (0.94 - 1.12)	.54	0.97 (0.84 - 1.14)	.74
HBV status				
Negative	1		1	
Positive	1.89 (0.79 - 4.45)	.16	2.36 (0.89 - 6.26)	.08
Hypertension				
No	1		1	
Yes	0.74 (0.28 - 1.96)	.54	0.36 (0.10 - 1.24)	.11

95%CI: Confidence interval at 95%, AOR: Adjusted odds ratio, BMI: Body mass index, COR: Crude odds ratio, COVID-19: Coronavirus disease 2019, HBV: Hepatitis B virus

Univariate and multivariate logistic regression analyses were performed

*Statistically significant at $P < .05$

4. DISCUSSION

COVID-19 pandemic has caused high mortality and changed drastically habits of populations all over the world. In this study, we interested in the relation between COVID-19 infection and concurrent diseases including diabetes, hypertension, HBV and obesity. To our knowledge, it is the first study in Cameroon that address this aspect which fits research priorities identified in the country [16].

Interesting, COVID-19 vaccine coverage was low in Cameroonian patients. This finding is likely related to beliefs of Cameroonian about deleterious effects of vaccines including COVID-19 vaccines. This has likely played a great role in increasing rates of psychological disorders such as depression and anxiety among African populations [17,18]. High rates of COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy was also found in South East Asia [19]. Even though individual is willing to get vaccine against COVID-19, lack of financial constraints are also particular important in resources-limited countries as Cameroon [20].

In the present study, no COVID-19 infection cases were identified using RT-qPCR. This is not in line with a nationwide study that reported COVID-19 prevalence of ~11.8% - 32.0% across the ten regions of Cameroon [21]. We conducted this study in Douala that has been classified as a high risk area for COVID-19 infection based on distribution of its risk factors (e.g., cardiovascular diseases, cancer, human immunodeficiency virus infection) [22]. Since 2019, countries faced several COVID-19 waves due to emergence and spread of SARS-CoV-2 variants [23]. Currently, increasing COVID-19 infections are mainly seen in Europe and Americas, and very few cases are found in sSA countries such as Cameroon (<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>). Implementation and scale up of COVID-19 control measures such as lockdown, vaccines, social distancing and masks have greatly participated in reduction of burden due to the diseases. During intense COVID-19 transmission periods, these control measures especially wearing masks and social distancing were highly used by Cameroonian populations [24]. Currently, such measures are no longer largely used in the country especially in armed conflict areas and less than 5% of the populations are vaccinated against the disease [25,26]. Thus, other factors such as self-medication with drugs and traditional medicines could explain low rates of COVID-19 infection [27].

A high proportion (36.5%) of patients were positive for HBV antigens. By stratifying by ethnicity of patients, the seroprevalence of HBV infection was 36.7% in Cameroonians. Noted that more than 90% of patients were not vaccinated against HBV infection, and this is consistent with a study conducted in Bamenda and Dschang, Northwest and Western regions of Cameroon [28,29]. Thus, the absence of HBV vaccine coverage could explain this high seroprevalence rate found here. This value is much higher than that reported in a previous systematic review and meta-analysis on HVB seroprevalence in Cameroon that reported a pooled rate of 6.7% in the Littoral region [30]. Similarly, more recent studies reported low rate of HBV infection in Douala, Yaoundé and Dschang towns [29,31]. Even though, we did not find COVID-19 infection, the management of HBV infection could be tricky in Cameroonians in context of the current COVID-19 pandemics. Indeed, utilization of drugs such as corticosteroids and tocilizumab for COVID-19 management is known caused reactivation of HBV infection [32,33].

Most of the patients had at least two comorbidities which were represented by hypertension, diabetes and obesity. In Douala, Mekolo *et al.* and Mbarga *et al.* found high prevalence of hypertension and diabetes in patients hospitalized and suspected for COVID-19 in Douala and Yaoundé towns, respectively [8,9]. Similarly, obesity was reported in > 20% of Cameroonian which is agrees several studies conducted in Douala [14,34,35]. Obesity and

overweight are related to change in lifestyle and food habits (e.g. physical inactivity, overeating) and represent raising public health issues in African countries such as Libya, Namibia, Gabon, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Egypt and Cameroon [36,37].

We found an increased risk of past COVID-19 infection with increasing patient's age, and this is consistent with earlier studies in the country [9,21,38,39]. Other studies outside Cameroon reported advanced age as risk factor for COVID-19 related infection, severity and death [5]. Physiological mechanisms sustaining the link between age and COVID-19 are still little understood, but impaired host immune response has been largely proposed for explaining higher risk of infection and deteriorated clinical course of COVID-19 infection in patients with advanced age [40]. Likewise, Hong and colleagues showed that blood levels of immunoglobulins G was risk factor for SARS-CoV-2 re-positivity in COVID-19 Chinese patients after discharge [41]. In the same vein with our finding, risk of COVID-19 history was lower in foreigners compared to Cameroonians, and this is likely due to significant differences between these two populations for age, obesity, diabetes and hypertension. Indeed, foreigners were much younger than local patients. Also, burden of obesity, diabetes and hypertension was higher in Cameroonian. Obesity and hypertension are known important risk factor for COVID-19 infection [4,7,13,42].

5. CONCLUSION

The prevalence of COVID-19 and associated comorbidities along with their impact on clinical presentation of COVID-19 were addressed in this study. Vaccine coverage against COVID-19 was very low among patients. Using RT-qPCR, no COVID-19 cases were found in the study. In contrast, we reported high rates of comorbidities, especially in Cameroonian population, that were mostly represented by HBV infection, hypertension, diabetes and obesity. A large fraction of the patients had at least two of the above mentioned diseases. The nature of comorbidities diagnosed in patients greatly influenced anthropometric, physiological and bioimpedance parameters. Age, ethnicity and BMI were determinants of COVID-19 history. This study outlines the importance to manage comorbidities in context of COVID-19 in Cameroon. Further studies should be conducted to more documented about their epidemiology and impact on natural history of COVID-19 in the country.

CONSENT

All authors declare that 'written informed consent was obtained from the patient (or other approved parties) for publication of this case report and accompanying images. A copy of the written consent is available for review by the Editorial office/Chief Editor/Editorial Board members of this journal.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

All authors hereby declare that all experiments have been examined and approved by the appropriate ethics committee and have therefore been performed in accordance with the ethical standards laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki. This study was carried out according to the guidelines for human experimental models in clinical research as stated by the Cameroon Ministry of Public Health. Ethical and administrative clearances were issued by the ethics committees of the University of Douala (N° 2924 CEI-UDo/10/2021/M), Littoral health regional delegation (N° 1328/AAR/MINSANTE/DRSPL/BCASS), and Douala Laquintinie Hospital (N° 06713/AR/MINSANTE/DHL).

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DEFINITIONS, ACRONYMS, ABBREVIATIONS

95%CI: Confidence interval at 95%

ANOVA: Analysis of variance

AOR: Adjusted odds ratio

BDH: Bangé district hospital

BMI: Body mass index

BoDH: Bonassama district hospital

COR:

COVID-19: Coronavirus disease 2019

DBP: Diastolic blood pressure

DDH: Deido district hospital

HbA1c: Glycated hemoglobin

HBV: Hepatitis B virus

NDH: Nylon district hospital

RT-qPCR: Retrotranscriptase quantitative polymerase chain reaction

SARS-CoV-2: Severe acute respiratory syndrome Coronavirus 2

SBP: Systolic blood pressure

SD: Standard deviation

sSA: Sub-Saharan Africa