

The impact of religion and traditional practice on infectious disease:

A case of Ebola in West Africa

Abstract

According to WHO (2018), outbreak in 2014 was the first time for EVD to affect West Africa and was the largest number of deaths ever recorded so far. The whole world very absolute shocked by the unprecedented horrible infectious disease.

In this paper, I consider do religion and traditional practice (use traditional medicine or traditional healers) affect infectious disease? I take the Ebola case in West Africa as an example to explore the relationship between religion and traditional practice, and the infection of Ebola virus. Prior papers mention that since EVD can be easily transmitted by contacting with body fluids or contaminated clothing or other items brought with deceased patients, the commonly performed funeral rituals, washing and cleaning of the dead body, significantly contributed to the spread of EVD.

In my main analysis, I use the EVD data from WHO released in 2015 to obtain the independent variable, Ebola infection rate. For the independent variables, I use data from the sixth round of Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) of Guinea 2012, Liberia 2013 and Sierra Leone 2013. Then I conduct the OLS regression after controlling series of control variables and get the result.

Surprisingly, the results contradict to the previous research. Quantitatively, the result shows that a 1 percentage point increase in the share of Muslims is associated with a decline in infection of 0.46 infections per 10,000, or about the amount of 17.75 infection cases. For Christian and those who believe in other religions get the similar result that they have the negative correlations with the Ebola virus infection. For the traditional practice, it turns insignificant after controlling the ethnicity.

As a conclusion, in my paper, I included those of no religions to compare with religious believers. Although minorities have very little representativeness, they might not be overlooked. I hope that two different results(previous research and my research) could both contribute to policy makers to broaden their viewpoints in policy designs.

Ultimately, the inadequacy include that research methodology needs to be innovated, particularly, to explicitly control the regional connection, I am considering to run spatial regression in the future research.