The Influences of structural, social and contextual factors to COVID-19 vaccine uptake: A qualitative study among healthcare workers and older persons (50 years and above) in Uganda.
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The Global Health Network

Published on: Jun 16, 2023

URL: https://tghncollections.pubpub.org/pub/65fzdk5n

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Background

World over and in Uganda, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused dreadful effects on human health, and social and economic life with over 168,000 cases and 3,622 death cases at present confirmed in Uganda. Uganda launched her COVID-19 vaccine rollout program in March 2021 with Healthcare Workers (HCWs), Older Persons (OP), and people with chronic conditions recommended as priority groups for vaccination. To inform the vaccine rollout efforts, we set out to explore the social and structural factors that influence the uptake of COVID-19 vaccines among (HCWs) and older persons (≥50 years) in Uganda.

Methods

Between September and October 2021 we conducted 33 in-depth interviews among purposively selected individuals; 25 HCWs aged 21-63 years from 3 hospitals, two hospitals in Wakiso district and one in Kalungu district, Central Uganda, and 8 OPs from communities in Wakiso district. The questions explored participants’ knowledge of COVID-19 vaccines, beliefs, personal experiences, barriers, and facilitators to vaccine uptake, and suggestions on the future for COVID-19 vaccine rollout. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, translated, and data analyzed iteratively.

Results

Twenty-two of the 25 (88%) HCWs and 3 of the 8 (38%) OPs had received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. Access to information on vaccines from radio and other sources, influence from religious and cultural leaders, being of old age, and having chronic illness were reported facilitators of vaccine uptake among both. Working in a high-risk environment (hospitals) and mandatory vaccination requirements by the employer were unique facilitators to vaccine uptake among HCWs. Misconceptions and rumors about the side effects of COVID-19 vaccines were common barriers to vaccine uptake among HCWs and OPs. Long distances to the vaccination centers, vaccine stock-outs, and long queues at the vaccination centers were specific barriers to vaccine uptake among OPs.

Conclusion

Mass vaccination campaigns should have a comprehensive information dissemination strategy about the vaccine. Improved access to vaccines through community-targeted vaccination outreach, and reducing vaccine stock-outs may go a long way to improve COVID-19 vaccine uptake in Uganda.