

Research Aim: Exploring clients', district, and health facility knowledge, attitude and experiences (KAE) and coping mechanisms for sustained Antiretroviral Therapy (ART), and RMNCH services during COVID lockdown

BACKGROUND

- During the COVID-19 lockdown, emergency strategies were implemented to allow optimal continuity of key health services in Uganda. However, the effectiveness of these strategies for prevention of ART discontinuation is poorly understood. Additionally, similar strategies were not used for other routine essential health services (i.e., RMNCH services), increasing the likelihood of lack of access and poor health outcomes
- To address this challenge, it is crucial to assess the impact of lockdown on demand and utilization of health services and investigate coping mechanisms in order to mitigate the impact of this and similar health emergencies in the future through evidence-based recommendations.

DESCRIPTION OF ORGANIZATION

Columbia University has been collaborating with Rakai Health Sciences Program in Uganda. This specific study has been done through collaboration with Makerere University School of Public Health, Rakai Health Sciences Program investigators and Uganda Ministry of Health and Masaka region local governments.

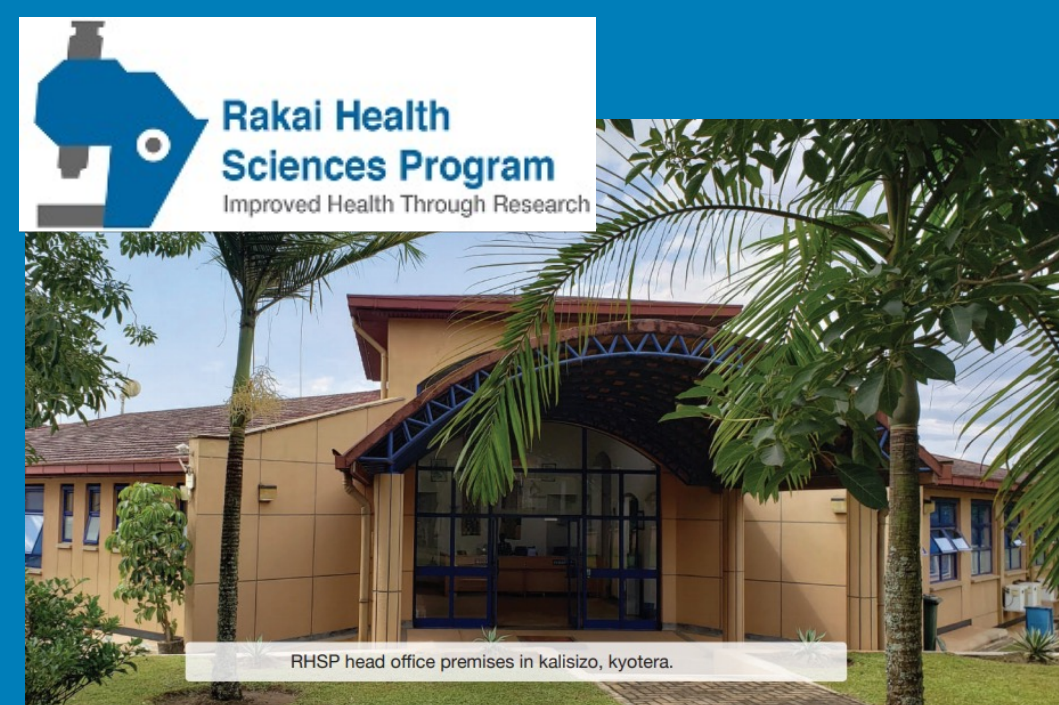


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METHODS

1) Interviews + Settings:

- Conducted Key Informant Interview (KII), In-Depth Interview (IDI), and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) in three Masaka regions: Mpigi (Inland/ Semi-urban District); Kyotera (Border/Rural District); Kalangala (Island District)
- Snowball and purposive sampling methods were employed.

1. KIIs: n=24		
i.	DHO	3
ii.	CSO Representative	3
iii.	Midwife	9
iv.	Health Facility ART in Charge	9
2. IDIs: n=27		
i.	Parents of children less than one year during Covid-19 lockdown	8
ii.	Pregnant women during COVID-19 lockdown	8
iii.	Women who gave birth during COVID-19 lockdown	11
3. FGDs: n=18		
i.	Parents/guardian of children less than one year during Covid-19 lockdown	3
ii.	Pregnant women during Covid-19 lockdown	3
iii.	Men attending ART clinics during Covid-19 lockdown	3
iv.	Women attending ART clinics during Covid-19 lockdown	3
v.	Women who gave birth during COVID-19 lockdown	3
vi.	Contraceptive users during Covid-19 lockdown	3

2) Qualitative Analysis:

- Conducted qualitative analysis of 69 interviews through inductive coding, open coding, axial coding and thematic analysis with codebook development

RESULTS

- Experience of ART and RMNCH during the COVID lockdown/restrictions:**
 - Delay/Failure to reach health facilities;
 - Domestic violence and/or child abuse
 - Shortage of health workers and medical supplies
- Barriers to accessing services:**
 - Lack of transportation
 - Socioeconomic challenges
 - Resource limitations
- ART sustainability coping mechanisms during the COVID restrictions:**
 - Movement permits for clients on ART
 - Support system for transportation and ART refill
 - Continuous routine check-up with ART clients
- RMNCH coping mechanisms during the COVID restrictions:**
 - Community support for mothers; reliance on traditional birth attendants
 - Failure in accessing family services >Reliance on condom and local herbs

RESULTS, CONTIN.

"They helped us to ensure that the people on ART continue getting their medicine. Remember there were no transport in the lockdown. So, it became easy for a person walk to the point where the medicine was being distributed." (District Health Officer).

"As I was pregnant, I got a good Samaritan who helped and took me because I could not manage the cost of the ambulance [100,000/=]. Gave Birth during COVID19 lockdown."

"We do have clients in villages where we provide the medication. We used to communicate to these clients through a phone call, and they select one volunteer as a group to come and get[ART] on behalf of other colleagues" (midwife)

MAIN FINDINGS

Promoting social support models, health and social behavioural awareness -especially among men- are essential for both community and family level strengthening, access to ART and/or RMNCH services and avoiding violence

DISCUSSION

- The preliminary results suggest that the nationwide lockdown in Uganda imposed a considerable impact on HIV & RMNCH health services access and utilization.
- To enhance inclusion and diversity of participants, it is recommended to further investigate wider sampling approach, through inclusion of younger adults and children as well as inclusion of more males vs. females' perspectives.

REFERENCES

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