

Healthcare workers (HCWs)' perspectives during the first dose Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) vaccine outreach programme in the Sik District of Kedah: A qualitative study

S Maria Awaluddin^{1*}, Noorul Emilin Abdul Khalid², Hadzri Zainal², Suraya Said², Rosmalina Abu Bakar²

¹ Institute for Public Health, National Institutes of Health, Ministry of Health Malaysia

² Pejabat Kesihatan Daerah Sik, 08200 Sik, Kedah, Malaysia

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Introduction

Targeted primary care outreach is one of the strategies to rapidly increase COVID-19 immunization coverage among rural residents (1). However, it was executed within a short period of time during the pandemic COVID-19. This may cause multiple reactions from the HCWs themselves. The study aimed to explore the HCWs' perspectives on the recent Sik COVID-19 vaccination outreach programme.



Source: Google Image

Materials and Methods

The programme was conducted from October 2021 to January 2022. A post-programme evaluation form was created by the Sik District Health Office team and a phenomenology study design was utilised to explore HCWs' perspective. It was a voluntary evaluation form and anonymous in nature, however the involved HCWs needed to submit the form to the district health office. The form was created via an open-ended questionnaire using a Malay language to explore the HCWs' field observation, experiences and opinion related to the outreach programme. The evaluation form was uploaded into Atlasti.8 software and the relevant quotes were highlighted. A suitable code was assigned, a code group was created and finally sub-themes and themes were assigned (2). The results were tabulated in table based on the theme. This approach was taken instead of focus group discussion due to time constraint and COVID-19 restrictions on gathering were imposed at the time of study.

Results

A total of 39 end-of-programme evaluation forms were analysed and three main themes were derived from the data as listed below:

Part 1: Description of access to vaccinees' homes		
Theme 1	Code	Frequency of code
Difficult accessway was prominent	dirt road (red soil)	24
	standard tarred road	15
	muddy road during rainy season	14
	partially tarred road	14
	hillside road	12
	poorly maintained road	10
	rubber estate-type road	9
	narrow and dangerous bridge	7
	narrow road	7
	uneven road	6
a road where the vehicles (car, multipurpose vehicles) had difficulty to pass	5	

Part 2: Description of challenges faced					
Theme 2a	Code	Frequency of code	Theme 2b	Code	Frequency of code
Structural-related challenges	road was inaccessible by vehicle; staff needed to walk and carry equipment	37	Attitudinal-related challenges	counselling session was time consuming and difficult to manage	18
	wild and venomous animals' threat	13		lack of residents' cooperation	16
	unsafe accessway	11		residents refused to change their perception	15
	difficulty to locate the vaccinees' house	9		vaccine refusal	11
	logistic and administrative problems	8		scolded by residents	9
	weather problems	4		vaccinee was not at home when outreach team arrived	8
	inadequate time to complete the task of vaccination in crowded localities	3		aggressive resident	7
	needed to climb a hill	3		lack of information on vaccination programme	7
	language problem	2		afraid of modern medicine	4

Part 3: Team members' opinion on the vaccine outreach programme		
Theme 3	Code	Frequency of code
An organised outreach programme benefited all	benefited the targeted residents	32
	hastened the immunity coverage among residents	10
	obtained more socio-demographic information of residents	7
	unforgettable experience	6
	opportunity to spread the correct information	4
	opportunity to develop network and teamwork	3
	disrupted the daily work due to inadequate staff	3

Discussion

- In general, the outreach team members generated a very positive response towards their experiences and the outcome of the programme with the vaccination success rate of 87.6% (486/533 Sik residents) despite hardships and challenges.
- The outreach teams need to be physically and mentally prepared as well as equipped to cope with environmental challenges in rural areas.
- Apart from structural challenges this study also highlights the attitudinal challenges in rural population contributed by disinformation, misinformation and even lack of information on the COVID-19 vaccine.
- Vaccine hesitancy or refusal is a worldwide problem and a strategized approach to develop rapport and networking with the community may improve acceptance (3,4).
- HCWs need to develop rapport and trust with the residents besides the skill in counselling and managing a difficult situation (5).

Conclusions

This study showed that structural-related challenges was prominent in rural areas such as Sik district, and the outreach team must be adequately prepared and equipped to optimize the programme outcome. A proper training in counselling is vital for the outreach team to manage attitudinal-related challenges, in particularly resident with vaccine hesitancy attitude.

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