

Acceptance and Delivery preference for Routine Immunization during the COVID Pandemic in Rural Setting of Rivers State

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Background: Immunization is one of the most cost-effective Public Health interventions for reducing childhood morbidity and mortality. The World Health Organization estimated that more than 2 million under-fives die annually from Vaccine Preventable Diseases (VPD) especially in low-income countries.

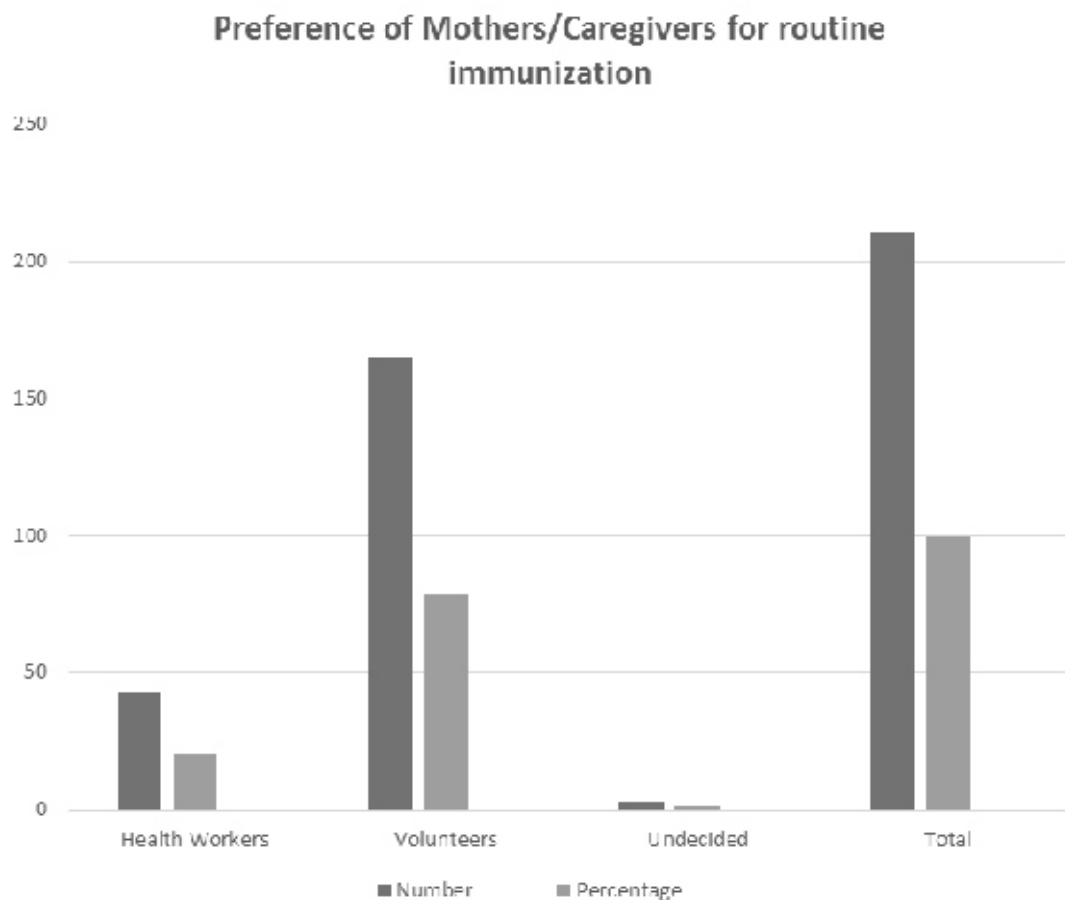
The Covid-19 pandemic affected all aspects of human existence including access to essential healthcare like immunization services for under-fives. There is therefore the need to adopt community-directed approaches to improve Routine Immunization (RI) during Covid-19 pandemic which is also a Vaccine Preventable Disease.

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted in May and June, 2021. Multistage sampling technique was used to select 211 caregivers. Data was collected with a semi-structured interviewer-administered questionnaire. Information was collected on acceptance and preferred providers of routine immunization during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic. Data analysis was with SPSS version 20. A p-value of 0.05 or less was statistically significant.

Results: Most of the caregivers (96.4%) were mothers while 4.6% were fathers/other relatives with mean age of 36.4 +/- 2.3 years. 86.9% said they understood VPD and 72.8% said they were willing to accept RI amid the Covid-19 pandemic. About a third (32.0%) believed that health workers have the Covid-19 disease and will not accept RI; 35.8% believed that they will be vaccinated with the Covid-19 AstraZeneca vaccine and will not accept RI; 78.2% preferred Community- Volunteers to give the RI while 20.6% preferred the Health Workers to give RI; 1.2% were undecided on Community-Volunteers or Health workers.

Preferred providers of RI by Mothers/Caregivers	Number	Percentage
Health Workers	43	20.6
Community Volunteers (Retired health workers, Patent Medicine Vendors)	165	78.2
Undecided	3	1.2
Total	211	100

Table 1. Preference for Routine Immunization



Discussion: Community level factors influence vaccination uptake, hence the increasing focus on community-oriented interventions. Demand-side interventions contribute to significant improvement in childhood immunization coverage in low-and middle-income countries. The use of community-volunteer driven model would augment the present routine immunization strategies in the Covid-19 pandemic. Community volunteers are more accepted and preferred mainly because of the trust the community has on them. Unfriendly attitude of health workers, inaccessibility of health facilities, lack of vaccines especially during the lock down periods were some reasons for the acceptance and preference of the community volunteers.

Conclusion: Community-Volunteers could be hidden resources for the provision of essential health services including immunisation in the rural communities during the Covid pandemic.

Key words: Immunization, community-volunteers, health workers, Covid-19, mothers/caregivers, Rivers State

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