

Community level health systems through the eyes of youth: Findings from using photovoice to examine maternal health in central Uganda

Field-building dimension: 1. Cutting edge research, Topic B: Community based health systems

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Background

Uganda has experienced several challenges affecting maternal health for many years. Maternal mortality rate is currently at 310 deaths per 100,000 live births. Health system challenges that underpin these outcomes include low awareness, lack of access, and poor quality of care when available. Youth are an untapped resource that could contribute to addressing these challenges particularly in rural areas. The study explored the perspectives of youth on the health system's problems that underpin maternal health in rural communities in Uganda.

Methods

The study used photovoice as a community based participatory research approach. 10 diversely selected youth aged between 18 – 29 years from 5 villages in Wakiso district, Uganda were trained how to use cameras then assigned to take photos for 5 months of situations related to maternal health. Monthly meetings were held to discuss the photos taken and identify the emerging issues from the research. Community dialogues were also held to discuss experiences and learnings at the end of the project.

Results

The photographs, ensuing group discussions and community dialogues confirmed the continuation of known health systems problems. These included long distance to health facilities, inadequate transport, waiting for long hours at health facilities, poor health worker attitudes and absence of health workers at facilities. By empowering youth to spend time immersed in their communities documenting and discussing maternal health issues, other aspects of health systems that need to be addressed also arose. These socio-determinants and intersectoral concerns affecting maternal health in the community included nutrition, education, domestic violence, unemployment, alcoholism, drug abuse, male involvement, water, sanitation, income generation, agriculture, housing and the work environment.

Conclusion

Moving beyond recognized health systems problems, youth through photovoice also highlighted important social determinants and intersectoral concerns that are key to defining health systems at community level and in addressing maternal health.