

Myths and misconceptions as barriers to uptake of immunization services in Nigeria

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Nigeria is presently one of only three countries in the world that are polio endemic. Nigeria accounted for 60.4% of all new cases of wild polio virus reported in these countries as of September, 2012. The immunization program in Nigeria has been marred by several factors including religious, socio-cultural barriers and myths and misconceptions. The objective of this study was to identify myths and misconceptions that affect utilization of childhood immunization services in Calabar, Nigeria.

Focus group discussion sessions were held among caregivers in Calabar, Nigeria. Data obtained were transcribed and analyzed using the content analysis approach.

Participants had poor knowledge of vaccine preventable diseases (VPDs) and vaccines against them. Some mentioned non-VPDs as if they were VPDs and also were not able to match some vaccines with the VPD against which they are administered. They mentioned several myths and misconceptions regarding immunization. Some believed that "so called" VPDs are caused by mermaid spirits and witches and wizards. Some of the solutions to VPDs proffered by participants included sacrificing in the river by midnight. Some caregivers felt multiple doses of vaccines could harm the children while others believe that polio is a result of a child being indebted in the spirit world.

Myths and misconceptions regarding immunization are still rife in most Nigerian communities. There is need to debunk them through health education in order to ensure success of the country's immunization program.

Biography

Aniekan J. Etokidem had his postgraduate training in Public Health/Community Medicine at both the National Postgraduate Medical College of Nigeria and the West African Postgraduate Medical College. He is currently the Head of Department of Community Medicine at the University of Calabar/University of Calabar Teaching Hospital, Calabar, Nigeria. His research works have been published in both national and international journals. He is interested in immunization transcend academic and professional realm. He is also a Rotarian, contributing his talent, time and treasure to polio eradication activities in Nigeria.

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