



Policy Brief

IMPROVING ACCESSIBILITY OF COVID-19 VACCINES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN CENTRAL JAVA PROVINCE



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Executive Summary

People with disabilities (PwD) community is a priority target for the 3rd dose of vaccination implemented by the Indonesian Ministry of Health. This is due to the fact that they are more vulnerable to COVID-19. Vaccination coverage for PwD remains uncertain since the data is not available on the Ministry of Health's Vaccination website. This study found several obstacles for PwD in accessing vaccines, and for health communication practitioners in conveying information about COVID-19.

Introduction

For most people, COVID-19 vaccines bring a new hope that allows them to overcome the COVID-19 Pandemic. However, accessibility of the vaccines remains a concern for people with disabilities. Inequitable access to information about vaccines remains a barrier for them. Information about vaccines, registration procedures, and possible side effects must be clearly communicated to all targets, including People with Disabilities (PwD).

In Indonesia, vaccination for PwD is organized by the Ministry of Health (MoH) through a special vaccination acceleration program for the Elderly, Persons with Disabilities, Educators, and Education Personnel (vaksinasi khusus untuk Lanjut Usia, Penyandang Disabilitas, Serta Pendidik, dan Tenaga Pendidikan). Special vaccination for PwD in Central Java was first given in August 2021. Unfortunately, specific data for the number of PwD who have been vaccinated are not available on the Ministry of Health Vaccination webpage. We can't tell the exact data on vaccination coverage among people with disabilities.

Australia Indonesia Health Security Partnership (AIHSP) and the Center for Health Policy and Management (*Pusat Kebijakan dan Manajemen Kesehatan/PKMK*) Faculty of Medicine, Public Health, and Nursing of Gadjah Mada University (FKKMK UGM) conducted a study on "Perception, Acceptance, Concern, and Accessibility of Vaccines, 3T, and Covid-19 prevention". This study aims to understand the perceptions, acceptance, concerns, and accessibility of COVID-19 Vaccines, 3T, and Prevention Efforts in 4 Provinces, including Central Java, in Pekalongan City and Magelang District.

Research method

The Research was conducted by AIHSP and PKMK FKKMK UGM in 4 provinces, Bali, Central Java, D.I. Yogyakarta, and South Sulawesi. The qualitative research took place from November 2021 to February 2022.

We conducted a literature review and secondary data review from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the Ministry of Health (MoH), and the COVID-19 Task Force, as well as other reports, articles, studies, and government documents related to COVID-19. The research was continued with Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) involving 24 respondents in each FGD of each province, consisting of the general population, persons with disabilities, and the elderly. The research was continued with in-depth interviews with local District Health Offices and vaccination officers from the local Community Health Centres or Puskesmas.

The FGDs were conducted in Pekalongan City on 17 - 19 January 2022 and in Magelang District on 24 - 26 January 2022. Participants were 12 respondents with disabilities (7 males and 5 females) in Pekalongan City and

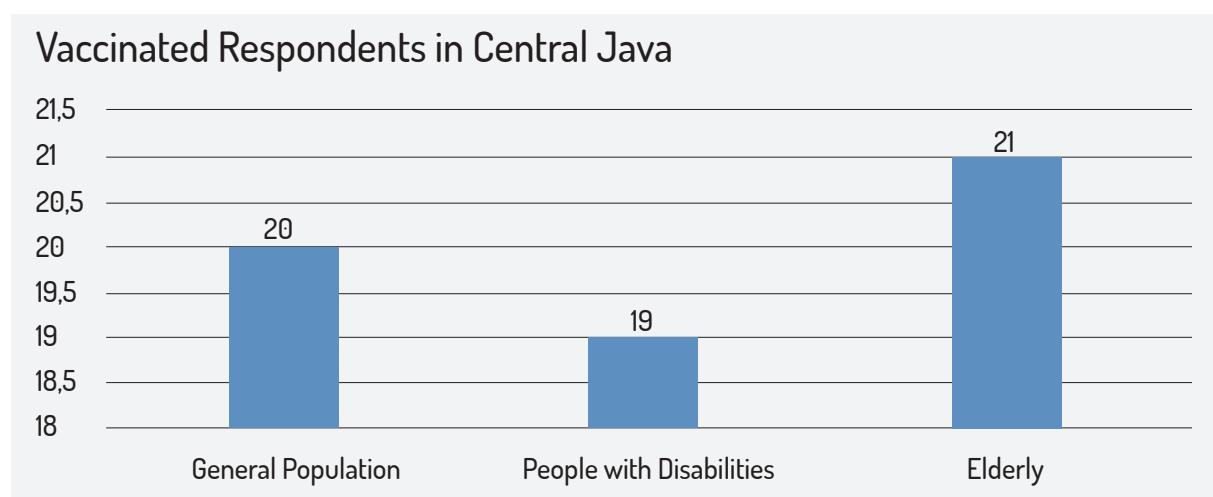


11 respondents with disabilities (6 males and 5 females) in Magelang District. The results were then transcribed and analysed thematically.

Results and Conclusion

Vaccination coverage in the four People with Disabilities FGD respondents in Central Java was the lowest among other groups. Out of a total of 23 FGD respondents with disabilities, 19 people received the second dose of COVID-19 vaccination. Four respondents with disabilities have not been vaccinated for several reasons including being too busy at work, refusing to take long queues at the vaccination center, missing out on specific information on vaccination for PwD, and refusing to participate in a general vaccination center due to fear of being rejected or discriminated.

Graph 1. Number of Respondents in Central Java who have been vaccinated



Source: AIHSP Research Results – PKMK FKMK UGM (2022)

The study indicates a number of accessibility challenges in the implementation of vaccination for groups of people with disabilities in Central Java Province as described below:

- **Lack of information regarding the schedule of special vaccination program for persons with disabilities**
Although the government of Magelang District had disseminated information, the respondents admitted that most of the information on vaccination was obtained from the community of PwD. A participant was not aware of the vaccination schedule because he/she had not joined the community at the time, hence did not receive specific vaccination information for people with disabilities and was reluctant to be vaccinated at the general vaccination center.
- **On-site Communication barriers at the vaccination center**
Some people with disabilities, especially those with hearing impairment said that communication with officers at the vaccination site was very difficult. There was no sign language interpreter available on the site. In addition, using face masks made it difficult for people with hearing impairment to communicate, because they need to read lips and the expressions of their interlocutors. People with visual impairment also mentioned the difficulties in the absence of a companion/assistant despite the existing visual signage and directions, such as when they need to move from the registration desk to screening desk, etc.



- **Lack of staff to assist persons with disabilities**

Research participants said that some vaccination sites did not provide volunteers to support people with disabilities. However, in a larger vaccination center, several volunteers from the community were in place to help them. Participants in the research were all active members of the community, thus they are more heedful, thus they were more likely to take initiative in assisting other persons with disabilities.

Policy Option

Followings are actions that can be taken to improve people with disabilities understanding on COVID-19, and to increase the accessibility of COVID-19 vaccination for groups of people with disabilities:

1. Develop targeted communication content and tools for groups of persons with disabilities. To ensure that information is disseminated right on target, the content and method of information must be adjusted to the targets. For example, audio explanations for people with visual impairments or videos with sign language interpretation for people with hearing impairments.
2. Vaccination for disabled community must be carried out by providing appropriate supporting facilities. Inclusive vaccination for PwD should be supported with additional facilities such as sign language interpreters for persons with hearing impairments, assistance for persons with visual impairments, and vaccination sites that are friendly to the wheelchair or other walking aid users.
3. Strengthen approaches through persons with disabilities community groups. Most of our respondents with disabilities are joined in a community or organisation of PwD groups, hence information or advice on vaccination can be disseminated through the groups.

Recommendations

- Provide appropriate supporting facilities for the need of People with each kind of Disability in vaccination centers.
- Develop targeted content and tools of communication for People with Disabilities.
- Strengthen efforts through community or organisation of People with Disability.

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