

Impact of COVID-19 on health centre service delivery in urban and rural Malawi

Topic guides: In-depth Interviews (front-line health workers)

Due to the iterative nature of qualitative research, the interviews that we conduct with participants will be open-ended and iterative, limiting the extent to which the content and direction of interviews can be fully anticipated. However, the topic guide provides a guide to the themes and questions that will be discussed with front-line staff at health care clinics. We will refine and update the topic guides as new themes will be discussed with each group of participants, which will be refined in response to new themes and findings that emerge.

First round

Demographics

Role at the clinic:

Age:

Birth place:

Highest qualification:

Length of time in post:

Length of time working in health care:

Theme 1: Experiences of delivering care

- Can you tell me about your day to day work? (explore how many patients they normally see at the clinic, what are the most frequent illnesses they treat, any challenges with stockouts)
- If you think back over the two months, have you seen any changes at the clinic? (probe around the number of patients coming to the clinic, incorporating new practices into their work including new screening practices, length of day, changes in the illnesses they are seeing and any differences in stockouts)
- Looking forward what do you think is likely to change in the coming months in relation to delivering care to patients?

Theme 2: Provision of support

- Have you been provided with any specific support to work during COVID? (if they say yes, probe around what this is, and whether it has had any impact on day to day work practices)

Theme 3: Risk perception and COVID-19

- What do you think are the biggest risks in your life? (probe around inside and outside of work)
- If you look back two months to now, how do you feel about coming to work? (is there anything you feel more worried about? Anything you feel less worried about?)
- What do you know about COVID-19? (probe around how it is transmitted, whether they see any specific groups at risk, what practices people can put in place to avoid becoming infected)
- Do you see yourself as at risk of COVID-19? (if they do, where to they see this risk is coming from, does it link to any specific procedures)
- If they do see themselves at risk of COVID-19 are they doing anything to protect themselves?

Second round

Theme 1: Experiences of delivering care

- If you think back during the first wave of COVID, have you seen any changes at the clinic?
 - Explore whether the number of patients coming to the clinic has increased or reduced (probe what influences people to or not come)
- If at all, what is the impact of the second wave of COVID on health service delivery?
 - Probe whether health service delivery has been reduced or not, what changes have brought in reduction in service delivery or what has caused an increase in service delivery)
 - Probe on what services have been affected in the second wave and why? Probe whether there have been changes in the way patients are managed, what have brought in changes in patient management

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- Explore whether there have been new practices incorporated into their work (including screening practices, changes in the ways patients are managed)

Theme 2: Infrastructural support for COVID response

WASH

- What type of hand washing facilities do you have in place at the moment at the HF
 - Buckets with taps:
 - Quantity (being used and in storage)
 - Location (multiple areas)
 - Piped water to permanent sinks:
 - Quantity (functioning)
 - Location
 - None
 - Other
- Has anything changed in terms of hand washing facilities since the first wave for example: now have piped water supply, piped water not working so using buckets?
 - Have any of these changes led to specific challenges at the clinic?
 - Have any of these changes led to improvements or benefits to the clinic?
- If you are using or have movable systems such as buckets with taps were they:
 - At the HF before COVID was an issue
 - Provided during the first wave of COVID and now not available – if no why not?
 - Provided during the first wave of COVID and still being used
 - Provided during the first wave of COVID and not being used – if not why not?
 - Not provided – why (already have piped supply, not known etc)
 - Do you have some of the buckets for handwashing stored in the storage room (if yes, probe for reasons).
- Do you have any soap available for hand washing?
 - Had during first wave but not now – why?
 - Yes have it available and being used now – why is it available now?
 - Yes have it available but not being used
- Who is the soap made available to:
 - Everyone
 - Staff only – if this is the case why?
 - Where is the soap from (personal, purchase, supplied etc)
 - Is the soap available all the time (if no, probe for reasons)
- Is the soap available even when the facility is closed for the patient guardians or support staff (e.g. security guards)
- Do they think that washing hands with water only is the same as washing hands with soap – in general and specifically related to COVID
- Do you have access to hand sanitiser at all?
 - Where is it from (personal purchase, supplied, etc)
 - Is the sanitizer available all the time (if no, probe for reasons)
 - Who has access to it? (clinical staff, all frontline workers, everyone)
 - Do you think hand sanitiser is the same, more or less effective than hand washing with soap? Why?

Client management

- Are there any checks on patients as they arrive at the clinic – what are they, what happens if someone fails the checks (e.g. temperature, clinical symptoms etc)
- What happens when there is suspected case of COVID?
- Is there any system of physical distancing at the facility? (arrival, waiting area)
 - What is it and how effective do you think it is?

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What are the challenges? ○ If there is no distancing why is it not done? ● Are thermometers available to check the clients? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What type of thermometers are they? ○ Where at the facility is the temperature check conducted? <p>Masks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Does the facility have masks available for frontline workers? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What type - explore for multiple types and whether they are different for different cadre of staff i.e. health workers, patient attendants or security guards ○ Are people using them – explore who is using what, why using and why not using ○ Are clients/patients arriving wearing masks? What type? What happens if they are not? ○ For those using masks, are they using them properly (i.e. cover nose and mouth). <p>Theme 3: Risk perceptions and COVID-19 <i>Perceived danger about COVID-19</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What are your perceptions on COVID-19? (What do they think might happen to you or your family should you be infected? Are you concerned about disease complications? Are you worried about loss of income or job because of illness due to COVID-19? ● Have you changed any aspects of your work practice due to COVID-19? ● Have you ever missed work because of illness or testing COVID positive? ● Have you considered missing work because of fear of being exposed? (If they were COVID positive, what did that mean to them?) ● If you think back during the first wave of COVID, how do you feel about coming to work? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is there anything you feel more worried about than before? ○ Anything you feel less worried about than before? ● What do you think are the patients' or people in the wider community's perceptions on COVID-19? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Have you seen an increase in fear from patients coming to the clinic? (probing around rumours about COVID?) ○ Have patients asked any questions around COVID-19 during their time at the clinic? If so what kinds of questions are they asking? ○ Are people in the wider community asking you about COVID-19, are you hearing any rumours around fear of getting infected? ○ Have you seen changes from the first and second wave? <p>Perceptions of the vaccine</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Have you accessed the vaccine? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If yes probe around whether this has impacted on feelings about going to work or work practice? ● Have you heard any rumours around the vaccine? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If yes can you describe what they relate to? ○ Who are you hearing these rumours from – patients, family members? ○ Do you think the rumours have impacted on people attending the clinic? ○ Is there anything you think can be done to address the rumours (only ask this if they report hearing rumours)
<p>Third round</p> <p>For this round of interviews we will be focusing on the in-charges of the 8 facilities we have sampled. Reviewing the transcripts we will ensure we follow up on any unanswered questions and target the guide to each in-charge (or clinician)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How has your clinical practice changed with COVID-19? [probe around commitment to practicing safety (e.g. use of PPE), interaction with patients] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Looking to the future are there things you will continue to do?

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How have practices and procedures in the clinic changed? (probe around strategies for preventing overcrowding of patients e.g. opening the clinic earlier, alternative methods of delivering services e.g. women administering contraceptives themselves) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Looking to the future do you think these are likely to continue? - How has the clinic been implementing the health communication about COVID-19? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o What communication strategies the clinic used? (probe around community engagement and the role of chiefs/churches in disseminating COVID-19 information) o If any, what challenges they encountered with communication? - What has been the impact of the health communication? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o How has the communication shaped people's behaviours and practices? - What do you think will be the long-term impacts of the health communication about COVID-19? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Looking to the future how do you think people will react should the virus resurface?
<p>Fourth round</p> <p>Changes in clinic responses to COVID-19</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you tell me if there have been any new developments at the clinic in terms of responding to the COVID-19 situation? (Probe whether clinic attendance, handwashing, use of PPEs/masks, social distancing has changed. What led to the change? What's the impact of the change?) <p>Health workers' job satisfaction and motivation during COVID-19</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think about your current working conditions? (What motivates you or discourages you to work during this time? If at all, does it affect your behaviour towards your work? If yes, in what way?) • Do you get allowances on your job? If yes or no, how does it impact on your behaviour towards your work?) <p>Psychosocial impacts of COVID-19 on health workers and coping mechanisms</p> <p><i>Perceived danger about COVID-19</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your perceptions on COVID-19? (What do they think might happen to you or your family should you be infected? Are you concerned about disease complications? Are you worried about loss of income or job because of illness due to COVID-19?) • If at all, does feeling at risk impact your behaviour towards your work? If yes, in what way? • Have you ever missed work because of illness or testing COVID positive, or considered missing work because of fear of being exposed? (If they were COVID positive, what did that mean to them?) • What do you think are the patients' or people's perceptions on COVID-19? (Do they feel at risk? If yes, in what way do they think they might get infected? Or who do they think might infect them? What are the consequences of them being infected? If no, why do they feel in this way?) <p><i>Social stigma and self-stigma about COVID-19</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the perception of being at risk of COVID-19 make you feel? (Are you concerned about infecting other people? Do you feel you might infect others if you have the virus? If at all, does this affect how you interact with other people both at and outside of work (families, patients)?) • Based on your personal experiences, how do people perceive health workers with regards to COVID-19? (What reactions do you get from the public when it comes to COVID-19? Any changes in how people interact with you or other health workers in the community or at the clinic? How does this make you feel? [Probing in this one around whether they have experienced any abuse or anger from the community more broadly]) <p><i>Social support for health workers during COVID-19</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you receiving any support to deal with the negative impacts of COVID-19? (If yes, what kind of support, where does the support come from?) <p>Is there any support you would like to receive regarding dealing with the negative impacts of COVID-19?</p>

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Fifth round

Focusing on the in-charges of the 8 facilities we have sampled, following up on any unanswered questions, and targeting the guide to each in-charge.

Theme 1: Impacts of COVID-19 on healthcare practices

- How has your clinical practice changed with COVID-19? [probe around commitment to practicing safety (e.g. use of PPE), interaction with patients]
 - o Looking to the future are there things you will continue to do?
- How have practices and procedures in the clinic changed? (probe around strategies for preventing overcrowding of patients e.g. opening the clinic earlier, alternative methods of delivering services e.g. women administering contraceptives themselves)
 - o Looking to the future do you think these are likely to continue?

Theme 2: Public health communication and long-term impacts

- How has the clinic been implementing the health communication about COVID-19?
 - o What communication strategies the clinic used? (probe around community engagement and the role of chiefs/churches in disseminating COVID-19 information)
 - o If any, what challenges they encountered with communication?
- What has been the impact of the health communication?
 - o How has the communication shaped people's behaviours and practices?
- What do you think will be the long-term impacts of the health communication about COVID-19?
 - o Looking to the future how do you think people will react should the virus resurface?

Theme 2: Gender differences in COVID-19 vaccine uptake

- Why are we seeing more men than women uptake? (explain that previous interviews showed this)
- Has this changed during the second vaccine?
- Access and challenges?

Theme 3: Uptake of COVID-19 vaccine among healthcare providers

- What is COVID vaccine uptake like amongst health centre staff?
- Have there been any challenges?

Impact of COVID on health service provision

- What is causing an increase in the uptake of family planning services? (Explain that previous interviews showed this)
- Has something changed?
- Why is there a drop in uptake of TB services? Has something changed?