24th June 2024

Editor in Chief

Infectious Diseases of Poverty

Dear Xiao-Nong Zhou,

We hope that you will consider our manuscript entitled “Molecular characterization of human rabies in East Africa - a case series report and phylogenetic investigation**”** for publication in Infectious Diseases of Poverty - *Case Report*. We believe that our draft covers an important timely topic that has for too long been neglected: public health failings that lead to human rabies.

Many thousands of rabies deaths are estimated to occur every year in LMICs, yet few are reported, including in East Africa, the focus of our study. Lack of diagnostic confirmation renders rabies invisible in official statistics and, perhaps, to the global health community. Since there is no treatment for this invariably fatal disease, rabies epitomizes the need for prevention. The proximate means to prevent rabies is emergency vaccination of rabid bite victims (which every rabies victim has failed to receive). Domestic dogs are the reservoir of rabies across Africa, but dog vaccination ultimately needed to control rabies has not been prioritized, even as rhetoric around One Health has become mainstream.

Through investigation of five recent rabies deaths in East Africa we illustrate systemic failures and recommend actions to address this entirely preventable disease. We uncover stark inequalities underlying these deaths that highlight the need to improve access to life-saving post-exposure vaccines and raise awareness about their appropriate use. We further show local capacity to confirm human rabies deaths, which we have frequently heard as a reason for not addressing rabies. Moreover, for the first time on the continent outside of South Africa, we sequence rabies viruses from human cases to investigate their origin and illustrate the value of applying genomic surveillance beyond SARS-CoV-2. The viral sequences help to reveal the scale of the problem and highlight cross-border circulation that is maintained in domestic dog populations, necessitating large-scale and coordinated dog vaccination.

Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, recently agreed to unpause their 2018 promised investment in human rabies post-exposure vaccines that was put on hold in 2020. Gavi investment should be a game changer in improving access to life-saving human rabies vaccines and for catalysing action on the deeper structural failure to adopt a One Health approach, so communities can be spared the trauma of rabies outbreaks. Our manuscript demonstrates how scientists and clinicians in East Africa are ready to improve rabies surveillance to support Gavi’s investment to prevent human rabies. Infectious Diseases of Poverty contributes significantly to medical knowledge and enhances educational value by highlighting the need for changes in clinical practice and diagnostic/prognostic approaches. We would be honored to have our work published in Infectious Diseases of Poverty - Case Reports.

Sincerely,



Gurdeep Jaswant

Corresponding Author