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ENGAGING WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC: THE CASE OF TRIBUGÁ- CHOCO REGION IN COLOMBIA

i. Public health policy, mitigation

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Background

COVID-19 pandemic is an emergency event that put to test societal structures around the world, especially in indigenous communities that have traditionally lived in isolated regions with little existing infrastructure and poor or no healthcare support. However, these communities frequently deal with emergency events, e.g. malaria outbreaks.

Methods

In this study, we engage with six indigenous communities in the Tribugá-Choco region, to explore how these communities perceive the COVID-19 pandemic and respond to it. Using unstructured interviews and observations, we explored their perception of the pandemic and developed a communicative strategy to help them to develop a better response that is feasible to them and respectful of their traditional believes.

Results

Our findings show that their perception is historically and culturally situated: 1) they believe that the virus is man-made, because they live with animals, 2) it was created to eradicate the elders and their traditional knowledge, 3) it does not affect children, because it travels one meter above the ground, 4) they have developed their own remedies, v) since the occidental medicine do not have the cure, they do not see the reason to go to occidental hospitals. The main difficulty of engaging with the communities was cause by distrust to “white people”, accentuated by little government support during the pandemic, and further challenged by their own experience of what poses a bigger threat to them.

Case report

Learning points

Conclusions

The developed communicative strategy helps to better understand how to engage with indigenous people in times of crisis and suggests potential strategies to improve communication.

Conflict of interest

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