

# Health Services utilization and delivery during peak and non-peak periods of the COVID-19 pandemic in Uganda

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## Effects of COVID-19 peak periods on in-patient admissions and out-patient attendance at public health facilities. Burnout and stress of health workers during health service delivery.

### BACKGROUND

- In 2019, Uganda's Universal Health Coverage index was only at 52.7%, suggesting inadequate health service provision
- A disaster like COVID-19 pandemic would destabilize health care system and leave many cut off from health care services
- We conducted an exploratory study of the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on health service utilization and health service delivery in Uganda to provide information on its general effects and magnitude

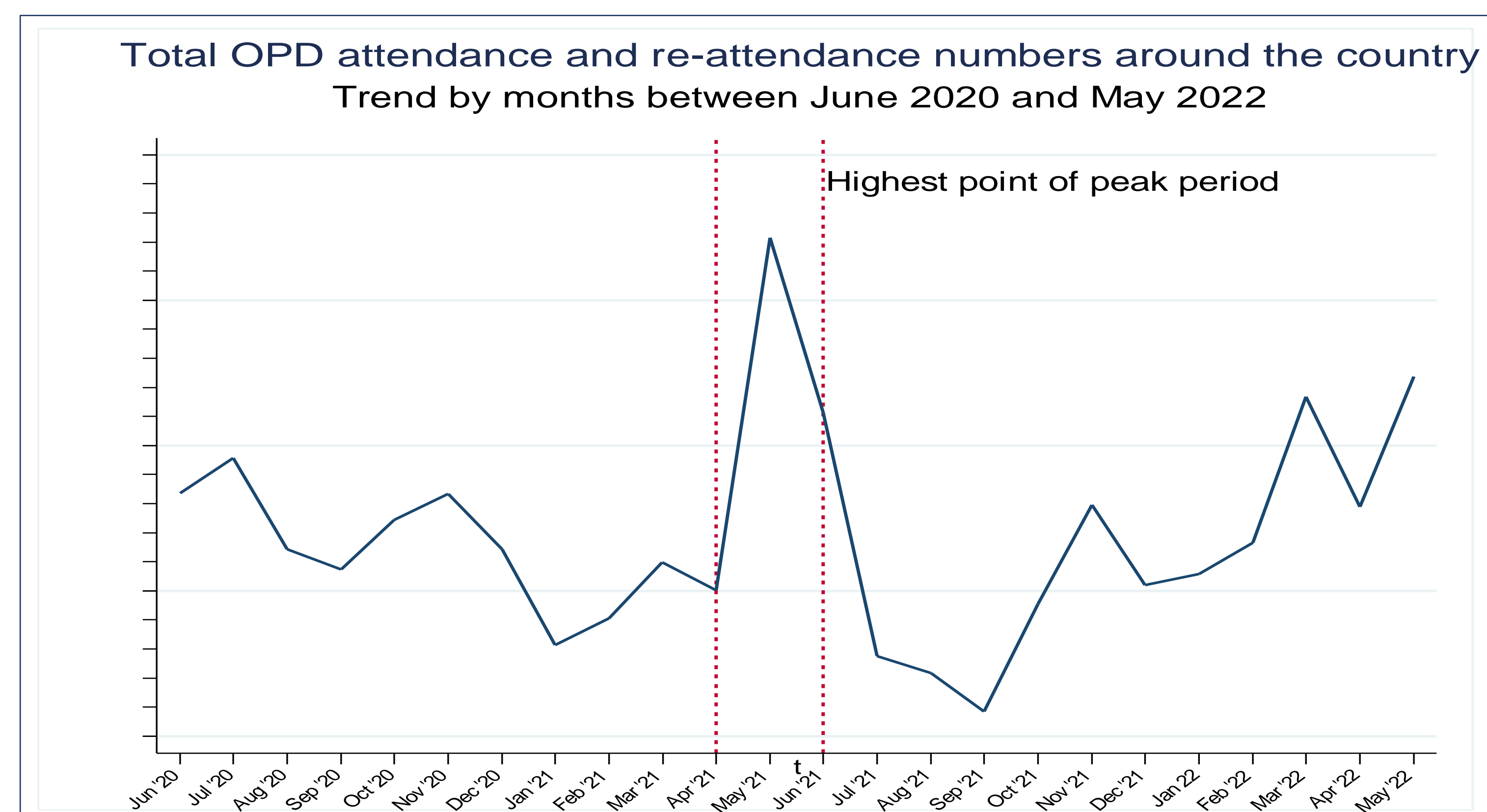
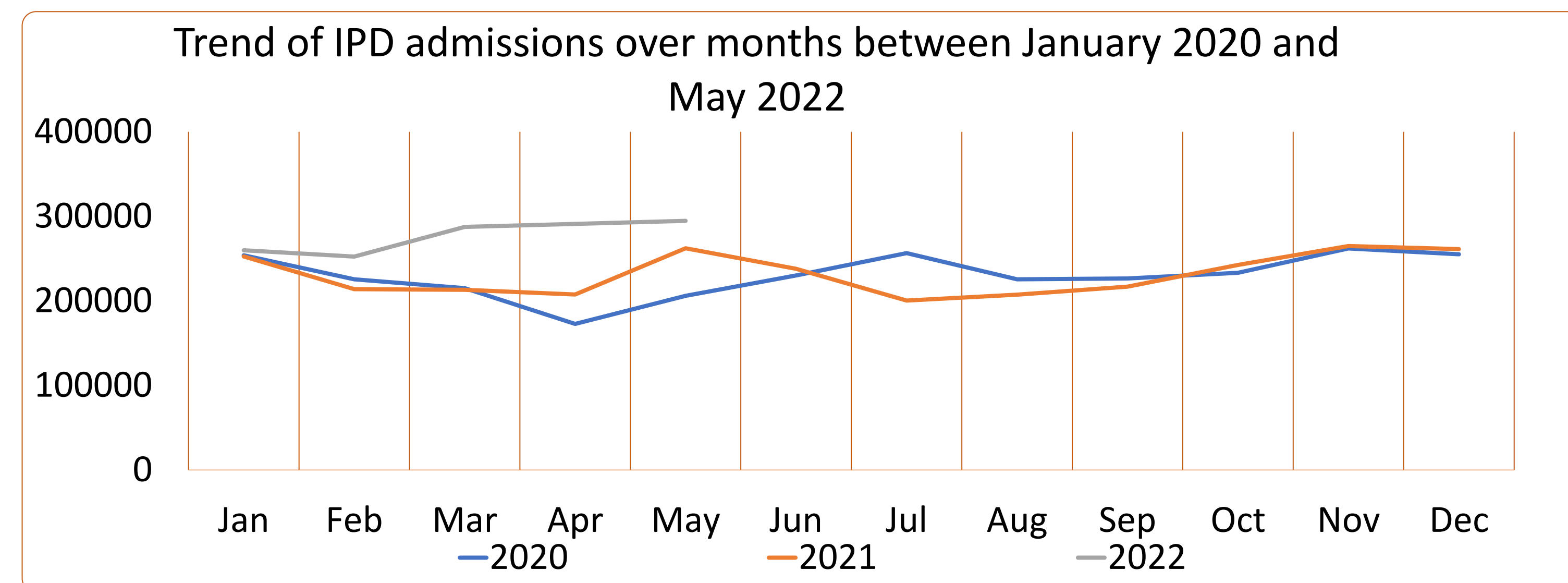
### METHODS

- We utilized a mixed-methods approach
- 48 Key Informant Interviews were conducted among health workers at health facilities at various levels in selected districts of Uganda
- We also collected secondary data on in-patient Department admissions and out-patient department visits for all conditions at facilities around Uganda between January 2020 and May 2022
- Interrupted Time Series Analysis was run on secondary data
- From the interviews, we identified common themes on health service delivery and health service utilization during COVID pandemic between January 2020 and May 2022.

### RESULTS

- Total In-Patient Department admissions at facilities declined by 29% and 20% between March and April 2020 and April to August 2021 COVID-19 peaks respectively
- Two-fold increase in OPD attendance in the post pandemic start period ( $p = 0.005$ ; 95%CI 1.26,3.60) (Figure 1 and 3)
- There was a reduction in antenatal and Maternal patient visits with reported rise in maternal and neonatal mortalities during the peak periods especially due to travel restrictions
- Chronic illnesses and HIV services attendance reduced in late 2021
- Health workers experienced significant burnout and stress due to heavy workload, poor support and fear for COVID-19 illnesses amidst health care delivery at all levels of facilities in Uganda

### RESULTS CONTINUED



### CONCLUSIONS

- Lockdown restrictions in the COVID-19 peak periods and COVID-19 stigma significantly interfered with health service delivery operations
- The COVID-19 peak periods greatly affected access to the facilities, particularly for mothers and their children.
- It is necessary to ensure ease of movement of health workers and to facilitate their working conditions during similar pandemic, particularly in rural areas.
- Critical services can be brought closer to people when distances to facilities are quite big.

This study clearly highlights the existing gaps in Uganda's health care delivery and how an emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic can paralyse health care delivery and utilization of health services especially in rural areas. It also shows that

### ADDITIONAL KEY INFORMATION

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Authors declare no conflict of interest

