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## An Environmental Assessment of Barriers to HPV Vaccination in Lira, Uganda

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**An Environmental Assessment of Barriers to HPV Vaccination in Lira, Uganda**

**Mary Ryan, Amy Leader PhD\***

**Introduction:** Vaccination against HPV is a global concern, given that cervical cancer is the most common cancer among women in developing countries, such as Uganda. Uganda has launched a national program to vaccinate girls 9-13 with Gardasil® for HPV prevention, yet areas like Lira in northern Uganda are well below the 80% coverage goal. While there is infrastructure at a national level to vaccinate girls against HPV, this project aimed to assess barriers to vaccination at a local level.

**Methods:** Semi-structured interviews with individuals in Lira, providers at Ayira Health Services, and a stakeholder at the Uganda Ministry of Health were conducted. Each category of participant followed an interview guide that aimed to uncover personal barriers, logistical obstacles, or population-wide issues that hindered vaccination. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and qualitatively analyzed using the NVivo software program.

**Results:** 26 individuals, 2 providers, and 1 stakeholder were interviewed for this project. Data analysis shows common themes of distance, information, and stock supply as barriers to HPV vaccination attainment. Multiple individuals expressed a lack of understanding in the virology of HPV, such as how it is acquired, spread, or its causal relation to cervical cancer.

**Conclusion:** Interviews provided a setting to discuss awareness and education about HPV, cervical cancer, and the national vaccination program. These results uncover barriers that can be addressed at local, national, and global levels to increase vaccination rates in Uganda. This study

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design could also be applicable in other countries that are below the ideal vaccination coverage rate.