

Barriers and facilitators to accessing acute stroke care services in Tanzania: a qualitative study

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Introduction: Stroke is a leading cause of death and disability globally, posing a significant burden in low- and middle-income countries. Tanzania has initiated public health campaigns to raise stroke awareness and established acute stroke units in tertiary hospitals to bridge the stroke care gaps. However, lack of universal health coverage and underdeveloped primary healthcare infrastructures remain significant obstacles to delivering high-quality acute care services.

Objective: To explore barriers and facilitators to accessing acute stroke care services in Tanzania.

Materials and Methods: The study adopted a descriptive phenomenology design and included 45 purposively recruited healthcare providers, stroke survivors, and caregivers at Muhimbili National Hospital in Tanzania. In-depth interviews were conducted from June to September, 2024. Inductive thematic analysis was performed using Dedoose software.

Results: Thematic analysis revealed three barriers and three facilitators to accessing acute stroke care. The barriers included low health literacy, high costs of stroke care, and an undeveloped primary care system. The facilitators included the establishment of a national stroke center, the availability of social support, and increased funding allocation for healthcare.

Conclusion: There is a need for raising public awareness on stroke, and increasing availability of medical supplies, diagnostics, and stroke experts in primary healthcare facilities. Also, there is a need to explore the use digital platforms in providing real-time tele-stroke consultations.

Already Known Information About the Topic: Lack of universal health coverage and underdeveloped primary healthcare infrastructures remain significant obstacles to delivering high-quality acute care services in Tanzania.

Keywords: Stroke, universal health coverage, healthcare system, primary healthcare.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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Consent to participate

Written informed consent was obtained from all the participants.

Ethical approval

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Muhimbili University of Health and Allied Sciences (Ref. No. MUHAS-REC-04-2024-2139), dated 2 April, 2024.