



Press Release

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Children and the elderly are paying the price for free treatment and care Citizens report being charged for these outpatient services despite government policy

6 May 2014, Dar es Salaam: Only 1 out of 20 (6%) people over the age of 60 and 1 out of 5 (18%) children under five receive free treatment and care at health facilities. Policy states that outpatient services for these two groups are free but citizens report that they are still being charged.

These findings were released by Twaweza in a research brief titled *Do health facilities work for people? Citizens and health workers report on health services*. The brief is based on data from *Sauti za Wananchi*, a nationally representative mobile phone survey of households across mainland Tanzania.

Health care is a key service required by the majority of citizens. More than half (57%) of Tanzanians visited a health facility between May and June 2013, either to seek treatment or to accompany a patient. Most (77%) of these visits were made to government health facilities. However a majority of Tanzanians (63%) believe that the government is handling the improvement of basic health services badly. Patients experience of health services largely depend on health worker availability and access to medicines. In September 2013, *Sauti za Wananchi* reported that 41% of patients could not access medicine at health facilities.

The picture is not much different when it comes to health workers. Dispensaries and health centres are largely under-staffed, for the most part they operate with half of the recommended numbers of clinical and nursing staff. Of the staff employed, a third (31%) were absent during an unannounced visit to the health facility. Lack of staff employed and present can lead to longer waiting times and poorer services.

Most patients (70%) who visit government health facilities are required to wait longer than 30 minutes to be attended to. This is in contrast with private facilities where less than half (45%) of patients wait for longer than 30 minutes. In addition, more than half (53%) of all patients visiting any health facilities have to travel for more than 30 minutes to get to the health facility.

"Patients are being denied their rights to adequate health care with the unavailability of essential medicine and staff shortages and absenteeism." said Elvis Mushi, Researcher at Twaweza *"The dissatisfaction with government management of health services may also result in less citizens choosing to seek treatment and care at health facilities, posing an increasing public health challenge."*

Rakesh Rajani, Head of Twaweza, commented *"Children and older people are hurting because policies are not practiced, they are too often just empty words. The government needs to figure out how to deliver on its promises, monitor compliance, reward those who do well, and sanction those who do not. Otherwise the government will lose credibility, and poor people will continue to suffer."*

The Twaweza brief presents several other findings as well and can be downloaded from www.twaweza.org/sauti

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Notes to Editors

- This brief and the data contained can be accessed at www.twaweza.org, or www.twaweza.org/sauti
- Twaweza is a ten year citizen-centered initiative, focusing on large-scale change in East Africa. Twaweza believes that lasting change requires bottom-up action, and seeks to foster conditions and expand opportunities through which millions of people can get information and make change happen in their own communities directly and by holding government to account.
- You can follow Twaweza's work

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