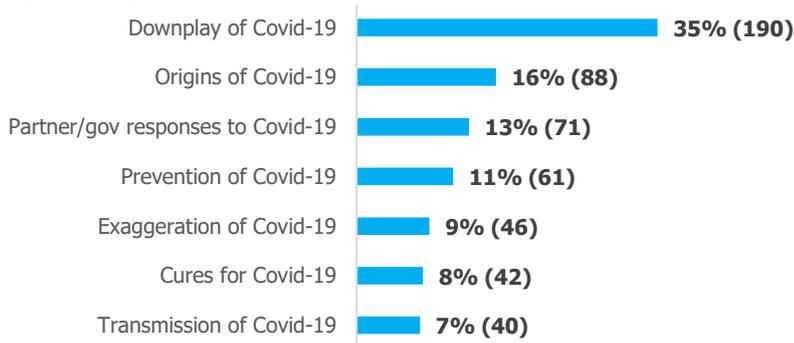


Covid-19 rumour tracking bulletin



Key findings



Most common rumours reported by community members:

- Downplaying the risk of Covid-19: Africans are immune; the virus is not dangerous but more like a common cold, and a political ploy by the government to serve their own interests.
- Questioning the origins of the virus: Covid-19 is a bioweapon used by superpowers for their own political and economic agendas. The belief that it was manufactured by the Chinese government and is being spread through 5G and donated facemasks was also shared.
- Concerns and fears that food assistance will be stopped altogether, or that the frequency of distributions will be altered and that refugees will be to be sent back to their countries of origin.
- Belief that the virus can be prevented through home remedies such as drinking alcohol, consuming vitamin-rich fruit, and praying.

Methodology

Community volunteers and NGO staff who interact daily with refugee communities in Uganda captured rumours reactively from April to July 2020, across various settlements. Humanitarian workers did not actively solicit these rumours but rather took note as they surfaced. Some 550 rumours were attributed to refugees from South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, and Rwanda as well as Ugandan nationals.

The method described in this bulletin does not lend itself to verifying what percent of refugees are sharing rumours, but it does help to highlight which rumours are being shared by the relatively small proportion of refugees who do so.¹

Patterns in rumours reported according to gender, age, and location have been analysed but only differences above 30 respondents and the threshold of 10 percent have been included in the analysis.

¹ While rumours are spreading in Uganda, it is important to note that recent assessments suggest that most refugees can distinguish between rumours and facts regarding Covid-19. Ground Truth Solutions' key informant interviews with communities across Uganda in June 2020 found that 81% of refugee leaders are confident that people in their communities are able to separate fact from fiction.

Background

This is the first in a series of monthly rumour-tracking bulletins from various refugee settlements across Uganda (see demographic section for more information). The findings will be shared with the humanitarian community in Uganda to provide timely and relevant information about Covid-19 rumours.

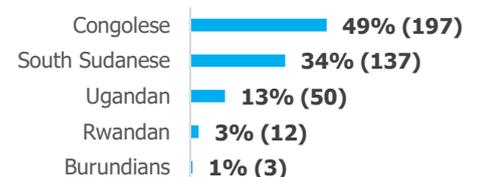
As an inter-agency effort, multiple partners will be sharing rumours documented by their staff and volunteers which will feed into future bulletins. For the pilot round, we have included data from the International Rescue Committee (IRC).

If you would like to take part in the rumour tracking initiative, please contact anna.christensen@drc.ngo.

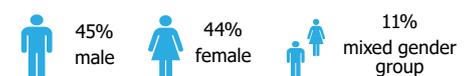
The rumour tracking is an ongoing project, and these bulletins will be updated and shared on a monthly basis. Feedback is welcome. Please send your comments to kai.kamei@groundtruthsolutions.org.

Demographics of those who reported rumours

Nationality



Gender



Supported by:



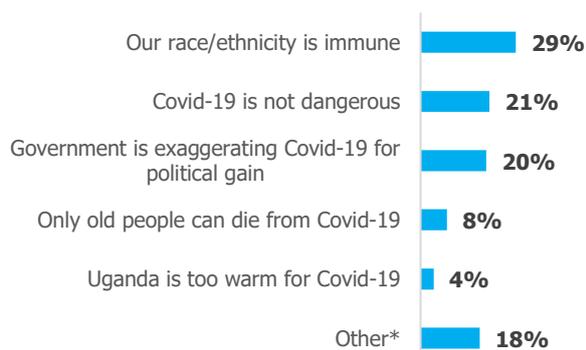
For more information on the methodology, including the TOR for data collectors and access to the raw data, visit the [Rumour Tracking Team Folder](#).

35% of rumours relate to:

Downplaying Covid-19

- Over a third of the recorded rumours express the belief that the virus is not a threat because Africans have immunity, the virus is not dangerous, that is it being used for political gain, and that only the elderly die from the virus.
- In Kagadi, where rumours from the Ugandan host community were captured, respondents were most likely to downplay the seriousness of Covid-19, as 18% of all rumours documented in Kagadi shared this belief.

Breakdown of rumours relating to downplaying the virus (n=187)



*other includes people saying that Covid-19 only affects people in big cities, foreigners, rich people, those who are unclean, and that it does not exist – that the stress of the rumour is what kills people.

16% of rumours relate to:

Origins of Covid-19

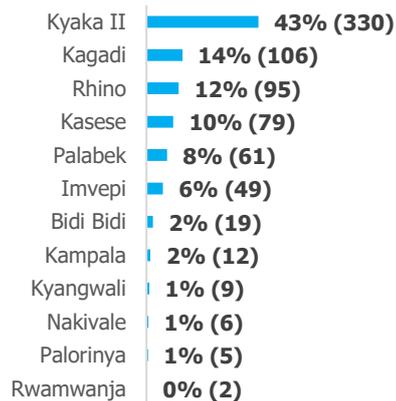
- The majority of rumours about the origins of the virus share the belief that Covid-19 is a bioweapon created by foreign powers.
- The Chinese are most commonly mentioned by respondents as the culprits. They are said to have manufactured the virus to kill Africans, and are believed to be spreading it through 5G cellular technology and donated face masks.
- The belief that the virus is manufactured by the United States or other Western powers is a common theme among respondents. The Kyaka II settlement is the source for at least half of the rumours that Covid-19 is a bioweapon.



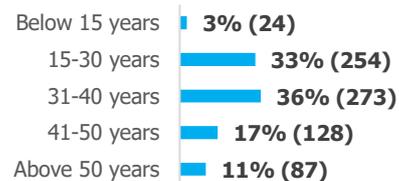
“Corona was made by the Chinese government who sent it to America and to Africa to kill us. It is a biological weapon meant to kill the people in the community.” – April 2020, Kyaka II, male under 15 years old

Demographics continued

Location

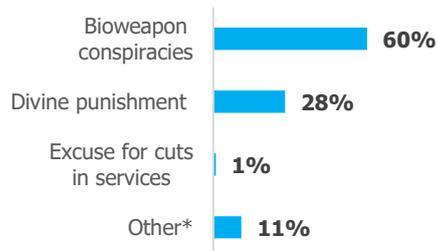


Age



“There is no corona here in Kagadi but we are suffering.” – May 2020, Kagadi, female in their 30’s

Breakdown of rumours relating to the origins of the virus (n=88)



*other includes the belief that Covid-19 is witchcraft, that it spreads through wild animals such as bats, monkeys, and snakes, and that it comes from white and Chinese people.



“Covid could be a biological weapon by Chinese to fight Americans and Europeans” – May 2020, Kagadi, male in their 40’s

13% of rumours relate to:

Partner/government response to Covid-19

- Rumours that food assistance will be completely stopped or that monthly food deliveries will have to last for several months at a time were most commonly mentioned by respondents.
- Almost a third of these rumours suggest that refugees will be sent back to their respective country of origin.



"...all refugees in Uganda will be sent back to their countries of origin in September 2020 when all assistance will be stopped." – June 2020, Nakivale, male in their 20's

11% of rumours relate to:

Prevention of Covid-19

- The most commonly shared rumour around Covid-19 prevention recorded is that drinking alcohol prevents the virus. Specifically, consuming hard alcohol such as distilled spirits or "Waragi."
- Home remedies also said to prevent Covid-19 include hot tea, local greens and herbs, bitter fruit, and salt. Over a third (37%) of these rumours were reported from Palabek.



"Alcohol/Waragi is associated with hand rub/sanitiser, so Waragi drinkers will never be infected by Covid-19." – May 2020, Kasese, male in their 30's

9% of rumours relate to:

Covid-19 cures

- Drinking hot water, hot tea, and alcohol are mentioned most frequently as effective cures for the virus. Other cures include vitamin-rich fruit (such as mangoes, oranges, and lemons), local herbs and greens, and porridge.
- One of the more unusual home remedies documented in Kyaka II is the suggestion that if one can find a strand of hair in a bible it should be put in water and then drunk as a remedy.



"Covid can be cured by local herbs if taken very well." – May 2020, Kagadi, female in their 30's

Breakdown of rumours relating to partner or government response to the virus (n=66)

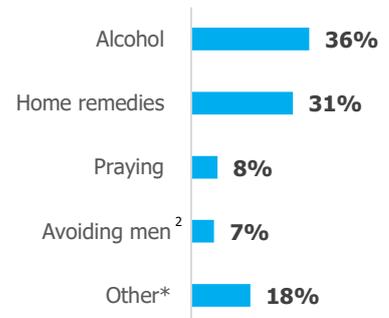


*other includes queries around Covid-19 policies such as when schools will be reopened, whether hospitals are still operating, whether urban refugees are receiving more assistance, and how cash assistance will be impacted.



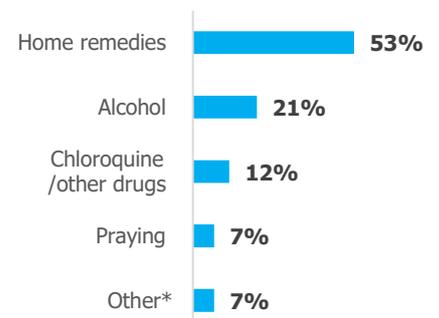
"Little food will be given to people due to coronavirus." – April 2020, Rhino, female in their 20's

Breakdown of rumours relating to cures for the virus (n=61)



*other includes the belief that a vaccine has been developed for the virus, but that Chinese and white people are too selfish to share it, that vaccines are being tested in Africa, and that large-scale disinfectant activities will take place in Uganda.

Breakdown of rumours relating to cures for the virus (n=44)



*other includes the belief that Israel and China have developed a vaccine and that cash assistance has been reduced in order to fund a Covid-19 cure and medicine.

² This is due to a confusion of men with the acronym M.E.N (mouth, eyes, and nose).

8% of rumours relate to:

Exaggeration of Covid-19

- Most of the reported rumours around Covid-19's presence or arrival in a community come from the Bidi Bidi and Rhino. Both of these settlements are near Amuru, the Ugandan refugee settlement with the highest number of confirmed cases of Covid-19 in the country at the time.³
- The belief that contracting the virus is inevitable and cannot be contained was also shared by participants.



"Corona has reached Lokopio [Quarantine Centre] and the community is in panic." – May 2020, Bidi Bidi, male in their 30's

7% of rumours relate to:

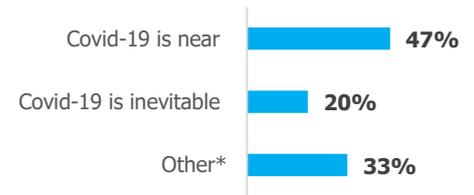
Transmission of Covid-19

- The most commonly reported Covid-19 transmission rumour is the belief that eating wild animals such as monkeys, frogs, and baboons spreads the virus. The belief that animals spread the virus was only mentioned in Kasese.



"Eating dangerous animals like baboons spreads Covid-19" – May 2020, Kasese, female in their 20's

Breakdown of rumours relating to exaggeration of the virus (n=44)

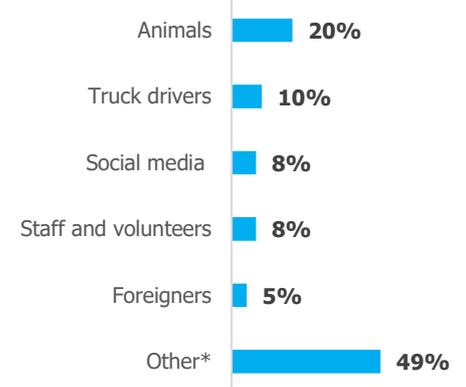


*other includes rumours that Covid-19 signals the end of times, that those who have been supporting refugees have all died, and that once it arrives no one will survive.



"Coronavirus will not end until the world comes to an end." – April 2020, Imvepi, female in their 30's

Breakdown of rumours relating to transmission of the virus (n=39)



*other includes rumours that the virus is spread through witchcraft, sharing sharp objects, dirty utensils, drinking dirty water, and using menstrual pads.

³ The Republic of Uganda Ministry of Health, "Covid-19 Situation Report", August 3, 2020, pp. 5, https://covid19.gou.go.ug/uploads/document_repository/authors/moh/document/Ug_Covid-19_SitRep167.pdf.