

COMBATING DISEASE OUTBREAKS THROUGH HEALTH INFORMATION PRODUCTS AND CAMPAIGNS TARGETED FOR THE RURAL COMMUNITIES OF SARAWAK

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Whilst a growing number of outbreak cases such as H1N1 influenza has been noted, we found very little empirical research that attempts to raise the rural community's level of awareness, knowledge, attitude and understanding with regard to the illness and prevention thereof in the Sarawak setting. Based on two cross-sectional surveys in Serian and Baram in 2012, we found that there were still a number of respondents who did not view H1N1 as an infectious disease. During the focus group interviews, the rural participants were struggling to recall some basic information about the outbreak and spread of H1N1. Our study also showed that the rural participants did not benefit much from most of the public health campaigns delivered through common channels such as television, radio, newspaper, online media, pamphlets and brochures. Their ability to process health messages is affected by the lack of basic infrastructure (such as electricity in Baram) which limits access to common media channels such as television and the Internet, as well as other factors such as language and

education levels. Similar data will be obtained from other rural settings to enable us to attain an important goal of the project, which is to construct a workable and adaptable framework which can clearly illuminate the participation of the interrelated systems within the local context. This framework will address effective ways of communicating health information that promotes the empowerment of rural communities to have an effective self-care practice that can curb the potential spread of disease outbreaks.

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A focus group session with the Long Bedian community during the Baram research expedition.