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An overview of the Novel Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) crisis in Fiji: Correspondence

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ABSTRACT

Fiji is facing the second wave of COVID-19 and has been recording increased number of COVID-19 cases. The response of Fijian Government is mainly directed towards obtaining international assistance in terms of expertise and vaccinations. While international support is necessary for the country, the Fijian Government also needs to consider the basic needs of the affected Fijians. In response, this article will provide an overview of the current COVID-19 crisis in Fiji to justify the need for reshaping the current approach of the Fijian Government.

Dear Editor,

The first case of COVID-19 in Fiji was reported on 19 March 2020 [1]. After successfully evading the widespread of the deadly virus for more than a year, Fiji recorded its first case in early April 2021 and is currently facing the biggest challenges from the second wave of COVID-19. Being a small island nation of 903,120 population [1], the current seven-day average of daily new COVID-19 cases in Fiji has increased to 776, steadily maintaining the upward trend [2]. The outbreak has seen Fiji rise to the top of the list for daily COVID-19 cases per one million population, surpassing hard-hit countries like United States, India, and United Kingdom. The trend for daily cases and deaths in Fiji is shown in Fig. 1.

Fiji recorded a total of 12,032 COVID-19 cases and 59 deaths, as of 14 July 2021 [1]. Four cases were from Vanua Levu, one from Gau and the rest from Viti Levu, which is the largest island of Fiji with 80 % of Fiji's population. While the country is diversely experiencing the knock-on effects of COVID-19, the epidemiological situation is getting critical for the Fijians. The Lami-Suva-Nausori areas on Viti Levu were declared as 'medical containment zones' by on 26 April 2021 and the movements to and from these areas have been restricted since then.

Moreover, 114,000 people in Viti Levu are living in the squatter settlements and 63,500 are from the containment zones [3]. The families in these squatter settlements live with at most three generations and have generally larger household sizes than the Western countries. As a result, it becomes difficult to effectively identify and isolate the COVID-19 exposed households from these areas. Additionally, the Western concept of 'staying home' is proving ineffective as the concept of 'home' itself has a broader meaning in Fiji. Maintaining social distancing is another challenge for the Fijians since the public spaces are mostly squeezed compared to the developed countries.

The Fijian Government is currently relying on the vaccine programs as a potential solution for the COVID-19 crisis. However, several factors are obstructing the success of the vaccine programs in Fiji and can be summarized as follows [4].

- Fake News
- Rumour on COVID-19 vaccinations

- University students avoiding vaccination due to upcoming final examinations.

Despite these challenges, 370,219 Fijians have received their first dose of COVID-19 vaccine while 70,917 are fully vaccinated [5], as shown in Table 1. It is found that the Fijians who are delaying vaccinations are mostly from the containment zones.

Finally, it is crucial to note that the overseas concept of 'one-size-fits-all' does not prove to be successful for managing the COVID-19 crisis in Fiji (mainly the concept of social distancing, staying home, and entirely relying on the vaccination programs). Empathy from the Fijian Government is also missing and their response towards the current COVID-19 crisis in Fiji has overlooked the difficulties and challenges faced by the affected Fijians. The Fijian Government should consider more specific measures related to the Fijian social and spatial contexts rather than following the footsteps of overseas countries.

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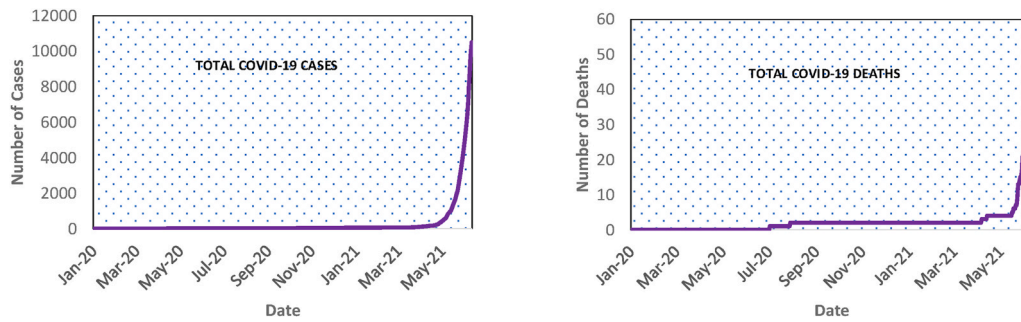


Fig. 1. COVID-19 statistics for Fiji.

Table 1
COVID-19 vaccine update for Fiji.

Sub-Division	Dose-1 (%)	Dose-2 (%)
Ba	97.9	7.0
Lautoka	65.1	18.9
Nadi	71.6	25.2
Nadroga	75.9	18.5
Namosi	59.9	8.8
Suva	59.4	11.4
Nasinu	65.9	9.2
Nausori	84.3	8.0
Tailevu	39.2	3.5
Rakiraki	56.2	9.1
Tavua	56.6	7.0
Kadavu	2.6	0
Lomaiviti	44.6	11.5
Bua	40.2	3.9
Macuata	63.4	5.8
Cakaudrove	37.9	8.3
Tavueni	42.5	9.7
Lomaloma	53.8	2.3

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