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# Psychological impact and perceived mpox risk among frontline healthcare workers during early epidemic phase, Uganda, August–September, 2024

*Wednesday, October 15, 2025 10:45 AM (15 minutes)*

On July 24, 2024, Uganda confirmed its first mpox outbreak, with initial cases detected in Kasese and Mayuge Districts. As a newly emergent disease, mpox posed unfamiliar clinical and operational challenges for healthcare workers (HCWs), whose limited experience and stigma surrounding the illness risked eroding confidence and undermining psychological well-being. To guide tailored support measures, we assessed risk perception and psychological distress among HCWs. We conducted a cross-sectional study during August–September 2024. Self-administered questionnaires were filled out by consenting day-shift HCWs: sociodemographic, occupational behaviors, perceived risks, and psychological distress variables. We determined the prevalence of psychological distress as the proportion of HCWs with a General Health Questionnaire score  $>12$ . A higher score from the 25 concern statements signified a higher degree of risk perception. We identified associated factors using modified Poisson regression. Overall, 339 HCWs participated at an 80% response rate; 215 (63%) were female, and 253 (75%) were aged 18–35 years. HCWs, 208 (61%), reported a moderate level of perceived risk. The prevalence of psychological distress was 26% ( $n=88$ , 95%CI=17–35%). Moderate perceived mpox risk ( $aPR=10$ , 95%CI=2.5–37) and high perceived risk ( $aPR=14$ , 95%CI=3.6–56) were associated with psychological distress. HCWs lacking infection prevention and control (IPC) confidence ( $aPR=1.2$ , 95%CI=1.0–1.5) and those without a clear health facility IPC plan ( $aPR=1.3$ , 95%CI=1.1–1.6) had increased likelihood of psychological distress. Psychological distress was common among HCWs during the study period, driven by perceived mpox risk and inadequate IPC measures. There's a need to combine mental health support with strengthened IPC protocols through hands-on training and clear operational guidelines to protect HCW well-being and maintain uninterrupted service delivery during mpox and future outbreaks.

## Keywords

Mpox, Risk perception, Psychological distress, Mental health, Uganda

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## Professional Status of the Speaker

Senior Scientist

## Junior Scientist Status

No, I am not a Junior Scientist.

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