SNAKE VIOLENCE & FOLKLORE

Using storytelling to understand and minimise human-snake conflict in Southwest Uganda.

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Introduction

Snakebite envenoming is a neglected tropical disease with significant mortality and morbidity. Across East Africa, fear of snakes often results in human-snake violence which harms snakes and increases bite risks to humans. Limited research exists focused on understanding the origin of these negative attitudes, which could suggest strategies to promote human-snake co-existence.

Methods

Snakebite prevention workshops were delivered in the Rubirizi community in Southwest Uganda. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted to explore the community knowledge, attitudes, and practices around snakes and bites. Inductive reflexive thematic analysis was performed to specifically consider the impact of folklore and stories on attitudes toward snakes.

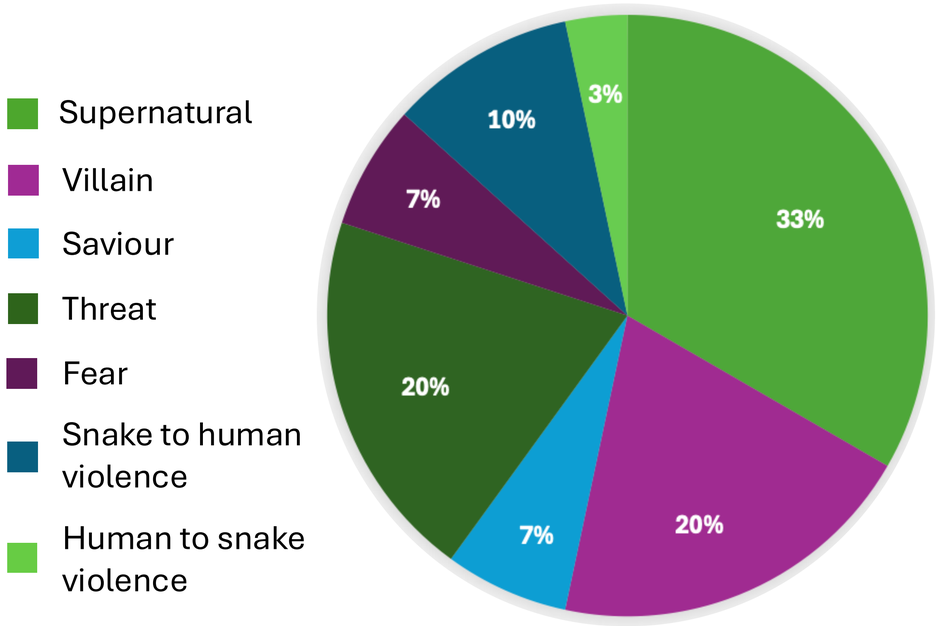
Results

Interviews were conducted with individuals who attended a workshop (n=10), heard of it from word of mouth (n=7), or had not heard of/ attended a workshop (n=4).

Attitudes toward snakes were largely fearful and aggressive.

"I just kill them when I see them because when they see me, they will only bite me"

Prevalent themes in the described folk tales (n=18)



Workshops supported the attendees to change their aggressive behaviours toward snakes.

"From the knowledge of the workshop I give [the snake] its peace, if it's in the road I just cross via the shortcut and then go away without tampering with it"

Conclusion

Stories appear to heavily influence community attitudes toward snakes in Rubirizi. Future research should focus on understanding the local narrative surrounding snakes and using co-production story-based approaches to promote snakebite prevention.

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