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Understanding barriers and motivators of Covid-19 vaccine uptake among young people in Soweto, South Africa

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Abstract

Introduction

The SARS-CoV-2 novel human coronavirus is the cause of coronavirus disease (Covid-19) Covid-19 is coupled with common symptoms such as fever or chills, dry cough, and tiredness. Less common symptoms include muscle or body aches, the new loss of taste or loss of infection. Vaccines are the most effective public health intervention that could protect individuals and the community from the severity of Covid-19. Several vaccine candidates have shown good safety and efficacy during recent randomized clinical trials, and seven of which have been rolled out to different African counties with over 1 million doses administered.

In south Africa there has been a low uptake of the Covid-19 vaccine particularly among the youth, despite studies showing positive attitudes towards vaccination. The youth play an important role in the pandemic as they are a crucial source for the spread of the virus to more vulnerable populations. Understanding the barriers and motivations towards vaccine uptake in this population group will assist in implementing interventions targeted specifically for the youth.

Aim

The aim of this study is to understand the barriers and motivations towards vaccine uptake among the youth aged 18-35 in Soweto, South Africa.

Methodology

This is a qualitative exploratory study approach employing focus group discussions. Eight focus group discussions with both male and female participants between the ages of 18 and 35 took place in two study sites, Themb'Elihle and Meadowlands South Africa. A total of 62 participants were enrolled in the study. The Health Belief Model theoretical framework served as a guide for this investigation. Themes were developed through thematic qualitative analysis and the data collected was examined and interpreted with the use of qualitative software ATLAS.ti.

Results

The study found that young adults do experience barriers and motivations that determine their decision to get vaccinated against Covid-19 or not. Misinformation was among the strongest barriers to vaccination. The spread of rumors and conspiracies of the vaccines left participants feeling scared to be vaccinated. This led to the lack of trust in health care professionals, and the lack of trust in governmental authorities leading the vaccines rollout. Motivation to vaccinate came as a result of the need to protect themselves and loved ones. Participants were also willing to vaccinate as a means to reintegrate back into society and to access basic means that were previously restricted due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Conclusion

The results of this study demonstrate that motivations and barriers that young adults in Soweto, South Africa encounter have a significant impact on their decision to get immunized. Policymakers are encouraged to look into the challenges faced by this group, with a focus on how social media can be used as a useful tool for reaching out to young adults and spreading correct information.

Kay words; COVID-19, Vaccination, motivations, barriers