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Investigating knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of COVID-19 vaccines among young people in Soweto, South africa

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ABSTRACT

Vaccination against SARS-CoV-2 is the most prominent strategy in the global fight against COVID-19. Studies continue to show that vaccines are one of the most dependable and cost-effective public health interventions available as they save life every year. However, World Health Organization (WHO) has identified vaccine hesitation as one of the primary threats to global health. Little is known, however, about the causes and nature of vaccine hesitancy in Africa. Moreover, in South Africa a significant drop of COVID-19 vaccine when it was rolled out the youth. The age group is of critical importance as they are becoming productive people who would be essential in the development of any country hence the need to protect them. Furthermore, understanding why youth are hesitant to get vaccinated is critical if we are to increase and sustain public demand for vaccination and preserve the tremendous achievements of vaccination programs on the continent. Unfortunately, there are limited studies that have investigated vaccine hesitancy among the youth populations and precisely looking at their knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of the COVID-19 vaccine. Hence, the study aims to investigate knowledge, attitudes and perceptions of COVID-19 vaccine among young people in Soweto.

The study employed a quantitative method, whereby closed ended questionnaires were administered using Redcap a very power tool for collecting data. Quantitative method was the best fit for the study for it accommodates a large sample size. Soweto-Thembelihle Health Demographic Surveillance System database was in the identification of the samples. STATA version 13.0 was used for statistical analysis.

Out of a sample size of 380, the study recorded a 79.2% (301/380) hesitancy levels. The study population recorded to be knowledgeable on COVID-19 disease and vaccine. However, negative attitudes and perceptions based on the study participants responses in some important elements. The elements included '*COVID-19 is a hoax'* (p=0.011), '*I*

prefer to gain immunity by being sick rather than by having a vaccine '(p=0.000) and '*COVID-19 vaccine has serious side effects*' (p=0.000)

The study found out that infordemic has played a significant on the knowledge levels precisely among the youth. The study participants were well- informed, but they had poor attitudes and perception towards COVID-19 vaccine. These insights could help to reinforce national efforts to contain the pandemic across South Africa in particular Soweto and lessen other important consequences of the pandemic well-being.

Key words: South Africa, COVID-19, Soweto, vaccine hesitancy, youths