



Perceptions of COVID-19 vaccination hesitancy and health messages among undergraduate students

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Abstract

Surges of COVID-19 have resulted in a push for vaccine mandates globally. Whilst current vaccines are perceived as crucial to prevent hospitalisation, parts of the United Kingdom population remain vaccine hesitant. Current research posits that reasons for scepticism are multifarious. They range from doubtfulness of the seriousness of COVID-19 itself, a perceived threat to autonomy, and safety of the vaccine, through to suspected conspiracy theories about the virus. This exploratory qualitative study aims to examine undergraduate students' perceptions and experiences of COVID-19 vaccination hesitancy and the most effective messages and communication for promoting vaccination uptake. Twenty-two students were interviewed using in-depth semi-structured interviews. Interviewees perceived "protection of the vulnerable" and "return to normality" as the most significant reasons for vaccinations. Interviewees explained vaccine hesitancy with reference to individual attitudes, motivations, and reasons, around, for instance, perceptions of risk, and control, through to more contextual ones, like the vaccination process itself. Interviewees perceived the use of community-oriented and localised messages and information, as the most effective means to encourage uptake of vaccinations. We conclude that more qualitative research is required regarding perceptions and reasons for vaccine hesitancy, including constructs, such as "individual risk" in people's lives and how they affect attitudes and motivations towards the COVID-19 vaccine. The article premises that it is not sufficient to associate constructions of hesitancy around "poor" health and wellbeing only, and that more relatable community-based public health messages and information should be considered, that account for the importance of community understandings and constructions of risk.

Keywords: COVID-19, vaccination hesitancy, risk, health communication, health messages, United Kingdom