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Preliminary COVID-19 Vaccine Survey reveals four distinct groups of unvaccinated individuals

Preliminary results from the University of Cape Town's (UCT) Southern Africa Labour Development Research Unit's (SALDRU) first COVID-19 Vaccine Survey (COVACS), revealed that there are four distinct groups of unvaccinated individuals in South Africa.

- The "as soon as possible" (ASAP) group – this group of people indicated that if vaccinations are made easy and brought to the people, they will get vaccinated.
- The "wait and see" group – this group of people are generally fearful about the consequences of vaccines and require salient examples of how many others out there were like them but have been vaccinated.
- The "only if required" group – this group of people don't see the benefits of vaccines but are unlikely to push back against mandatory vaccinations.
- The "definitely not group" – this group of people believe that vaccines will harm or kill them. Therefore, interventions are necessary to curb the spread of misinformation.

The purpose of the survey was to provide high quality information on the barriers and facilitators regarding vaccine uptake in South Africa; provide answers to the most pressing policy-relevant questions to support vaccine demand creation strategies; and to understand who is getting vaccinated and why.

In addition, the survey also aims to test the impact of different vaccine messages and rapidly share results and data.

"The survey was designed through a collaborative process with policy-makers and programme implementers. We hope that the data will help inform campaigns to increase COVID-19 vaccine coverage in South Africa through the holiday period," said COVACS team lead, Dr Brendan Maughan-Brown.

The team of researchers released the preliminary findings of COVACS 1 on Tuesday, 14 December. Approximately 150 delegates attended the virtual event, including the provincial and national Department of Health and officials from the National Vaccine Demand Task Team.

General data

According to Maughan-Brown, for the first part of survey one, researchers conducted interviews with 1 940 respondents across the country's nine provinces. Roughly 34% indicated that they will get vaccinated as soon as possible, 21% said they will wait and see, 15% said they will only get vaccinated if required, and 25% will definitely not get vaccinated.

He said the research has revealed that roughly 800 respondents were in the 18–34 age group, close to 600 were in the 35–49 age group, 300 were in the 50–59 age group, and 200 were older than 60 years old.

At the time of interviews, about 57% of respondents indicated that they had earned a wage in the past week; 63% had completed matric; and 71% highlighted that they don't have medical insurance. A further 52% said they knew someone who got very sick or died as a result of COVID-19 complications, 84% contracted COVID-19 in the past, and 57% of respondents revealed that not a single member of their household is vaccinated.

ASAP

According to the survey's findings, close to 50% of participants in the ASAP category said they don't have the time to visit a vaccine site to receive their vaccines; more than 20% of respondents said vaccination sites are too far away; more than 50% are concerned about the vaccines' side-effects; close to 40% don't trust the safety of vaccines; and almost 30% of participants believe the vaccine could kill them.

To increase vaccine uptake, interviewers asked the ASAP respondents if they'd consider receiving their vaccines in the next week if a trained healthcare worker administered it in the comfort of their own home or place of work – about 70% of participants said they would. Further, 60% of respondents said they would be motivated to receive their vaccines if they were issued with R100 vouchers afterwards. More than 80% of participants said they would get vaccinated if vaccination sites remained open after 17:00 during the week and on weekends.

Wait and see

Similarly, more than 70% of respondents in the "wait and see" category were concerned about the vaccines' side-effects; more than 60% said they don't trust the safety of vaccines; and 40% believe the vaccine will kill them.

"Many people who were close to me died after taking the vaccine," one respondent said.

"My sister had chronic disease. She was vaccinated and there were complications," another respondent said.

Close to 30% of respondents in this category indicated that they'd consider receiving their vaccines in the next week if a trained healthcare worker administered it in the comfort of their own home or place of work; and 20% of respondents said they would get their vaccines if they were issued with R100 vouchers afterwards. Almost 70% said they would get vaccinated if vaccination sites were open after 17:00 during the week and 60% would go if sites were open on weekends.

Motivation

During this leg of the research process, interviewers discovered that messaging plays a fundamental role in motivating South Africans to receive their vaccines.

After consultations with respondents, researchers learned that communicating that vaccines are far-reaching, and that millions of South Africans have already received their inoculations is critical. This, Maughan-Brown said, demonstrates “social proof” in vaccinations. Further, highlighting that vaccines are also free and easy to obtain is essential and could be the encouragement South Africans need to visit a vaccination site to receive their inoculations.

The survey is an initiative of SALDRU – a research unit based in the School of Economics - The unit carries out applied empirical research and capacity building with an emphasis on poverty and inequality, labour markets, human capital and social policy.

Additional data collection for survey 1 is still underway and will be released in January 2022.

ENDS

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