Barriers to timely vaccination in underserved communities: a community- based participatory research approach

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Abstract

Immunization is a life-saving public health measure that is highly effective. On the other hand, disparities in vaccination uptake still exist with underserved communities being the most affected due to multiple barriers that discourage prompt vaccination. The objective of this study is to identify and investigate the barriers to prompt immunization in underserved communities using a CBPR approach which builds trust and engages community members, improves data quality, and cowers intervention strategies. The study used a mixed-methods approach for design in collaboration with community members and key stakeholders in three under-resourced communities. Firstly, quantitative data were gathered using surveys to count vaccination rates and detect possible obstacles around vaccination. Qualitative group and interview discussions then providing a deeper understanding. The study went through the dialectic process, adapting the research methods to the data and the community adjustments. The integration of qualitative and

quantitative findings showed systemic, informational, and systemic barriers. One of the systemic barriers was unavailability of healthcare facilities and transport difficulties. Information barriers cover low health literacy and misinformation about the vaccines. The social barriers involved cultural norms and the stigma associated with vaccination. The community engagement process, through the CBPR approach, brought up unique challenges that were related to a specific locality, and the provision of interventions that were tailored to fit those contexts. The timely vaccination in the underserved communities is hindered by the multidimensional barriers. The CBPR approach demonstrated the contextual and nuanced barriers, thus, pointing towards the need for tailored, community-engaged strategies with a view to improving vaccine uptake. The findings promote interventions that are different but also similar because they target to serve multifaceted communities, proposing models for partnership, resource distribution, and informational campaigns to promote vaccine equity.

Keywords: vaccination, community-based participatory research, underserved communities, health disparities, vaccine uptake barriers

1. Introduction

Vaccination is a key in the defense against infectious diseases and one of the factors of public health that prevents millions of premature deaths each year (MacDonald, 2016). Nonetheless, despite its international success in terms of global health, vaccine uptake by all demographics seems to be one of the most persistent and difficult goals to achieve, pointing out how marked social disparities are especially in marginalized groups (Walker et al., 2020). This creates a difficult situation for public health activities and therefore for a careful thought to what is holding back the timely vaccination. The present study aims at filling this gap by employing a CBPR approach.

The application of a CBPR model in tackling public health issues is grounded on the notion that it promotes trust, includes local stakeholders, and increases the relevance and effectiveness of research outcomes (Israel et al., 1998). Through an approach that is aimed at actively engaging community members in the research process, CBPR seeks to identify facilitators and barriers by taking into consideration the pluralistic environments in which they are embedded (Wallerstein & Duran, 2006).

The study uses a mixed methods design in its examination of the barriers to vaccination in resource-poor settings. Combining the concepts of qualitative and quantitative methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) gives the study an excellent chance of revealing both hard facts and personal experiences of the problem. The quantitative phase of this study, comprising surveys, evaluates vaccination coverage and perceived barriers, following other examples which show the value of this kind of data in public health (Cohen et al., 2013). The qualitative part, including focus groups and interviews, goes beyond the numbers, thus highlighting the social, informational, and systemic roots of the bias.

The importance of systemic barriers, such as access to healthcare services and transportation, has been demonstrated in different health equity studies (Gulliford et al., 2002).

Informational barriers encompass issues of health literacy deficits as well as the pervasiveness of vaccine misinformation which have been recognized as the formidable challenges in the decision making of healthcare. The cultural beliefs and vaccination stigma within the society are societal barriers that reflect the social determinants of health that are disproportionately affecting the marginalized groups (Larson et al., 2014).

In the light of these multilateral barriers, the current study argues for interventions as diverse and rooted in the communities as the communities are themselves. Such a targeted approach necessitates multi-level measures involving collaboration among various sectors, focused funding, and community-specific educational programs to promote vaccine equity.

Thus, in sum, this study, founded on CBPR methodology, not only sheds light on the hurdles to vaccination but also aids the equity champions in public health practice. The study reconfirms that to improve vaccine coverage in underserved communities, interventions need to be as diverse and dynamic as the communities they are aimed at.

2. Literature review

2.1 Introduction to Vaccination in underserved communities

Immunization is as an important part of public health that provides a critical prevention against infectious diseases and healthy population. It entails the administration of vaccines that stimulate the immune system to develop immunity to certain infections and thus the infection risk and pathogen transmission reduces (WHO, 2021). Vaccination should be done on time to prevent individuals from exposing to any potentially harmful pathogens thus playing a significant role in disease prevention. (CDC, 2020)

Communities that are vulnerable often share commonalities that include socioeconomic disadvantage which makes it difficult for them to gain access to and use vaccination services.These challenges comprise lack of access to healthcare facilities, financial constrains, transport system difficulties as well as cultural and linguistic variations that lead to inappropriate health-seeking behaviors (CDC, 2016). Hence, vaccination coverage rates are generally low in underserved communities, leading to disparities in disease burden and health outcomes (Lu et al., 2020).

2.2. Socioeconomic Factors Influencing Vaccination Uptake

Social economic factors show a great effect on the vaccination uptake with access to health services being one of the most important contributors. People with a low socioeconomic status typically face impediments like no access to healthcare facilities, transport difficulties, and financial constraints that may stop them from receiving vaccinations (CDC, 2016). Besides lacking health insurance coverage and having low health literacy, these issues also make it harder for the disadvantaged to access the vaccines, so the vaccination rate for the disadvantaged is poor (Lu et al., 2020).

The relationship between poverty education level and vaccination has been shown through the studies to be a strong one. Studies

show that people living in poverty or having lower levels of education receive vaccines less frequently than their wealthy and educated peers (Smith et al. 2017). Despite ongoing socioeconomic inequalities in vaccination coverage for several vaccine-preventable diseases such as influenza, measles, HPV and others (Lu et al., 2020). These inequalities lead to uneven disease burden and health outcomes in the different socioeconomic groups, thereby amplifying health disparities within the communities.

Comprehensively tackling the socioeconomic barriers to vaccination will demand multi-level approaches engaging both healthcare system reforms and outreaches. For example, mobile vaccination clinics, community-based education programs, and financial barriers through subsidized vaccination programs have demonstrated feasibility in improving vaccination uptake among underserved populations (CDC, 2016). Via the recognition and tackling of vaccination's social-economic determinants, public health initiatives can aspire to reach for equitable vaccine coverage and elimination of health disparities

2.3. Cultural and Linguistic Barriers to Vaccination

Cultural and language barriers have a strong influence on vaccination attitudes and practices, having a potential to pose obstacles to completing successful vaccination programmes in diverse communities. Beliefs and practices of the society that influence the perception of an individual regarding vaccines is the deciding factor for the acceptance or reluctance of individuals to vaccinate (Quinn et al., 2016). Cultural elements, such as religious beliefs, traditional healing practices, and mistrust towards Western medicine, are some of the factors that can cause vaccine hesitancy within certain communities (Opel et al., 2020). Knowing and adhering to cultural norms and values are keys to creating culturally aware vaccine programs that appeal to different populations.

The language gap is also one of the major issues in vaccine awareness and information communication. Lacking fluency in the mainstream language used in healthcare systems can hinder vaccination recommendations and procedures understanding (Frew et al., 2017). Additionally, inappropriate translation and interpretation services lead to misinformation or misunderstanding about vaccination, making the problem even more serious, i.e. more people are against vaccination and the number of people getting vaccinated decreases (Opel et al., 2020).

To overcome cultural and linguistic obstacles one needs to adopt specialized methods that depend on cultural competence and language access. By using culturally appropriate education materials and messages we can dismiss myths or doubts about vaccines, but at the same time respecting cultural beliefs and values (Frew et al., 2017). Vaccine advocacy by networking community leaders and people of trust and respect is key to improving trust and acceptance of vaccines within the communities (Quinn et al., 2016). Also, using language services, such as professional interpretation and translation services, guarantees better communication with individuals who do not speak the main language in healthcare settings (Opel et al., 2020).

Through identification and elimination of cultural and linguistic barriers, vaccination programs can boost their efficiency in providing services to underserved populations, which will in turn result in better public health outcomes.

2.4. Healthcare System Challenges in Underserved Communities

Health care system hurdles in under-resourced communities are enormous obstacles to timely vaccination hence further widening the gap in equitable vaccine access and uptake. Structural issues in healthcare systems act as a barrier to the delivery of vaccination as they bar people from accessing basic services and resources. The barriers include health infrastructure deficiencies, medical personnel shortage, and supply chain disruptions (WHO, 2019).

Communities that are underserved lack sufficient medical facilities, such as clinics and hospitals; thus, they are unable to avail vaccination services. In addition, there is a lack of qualified health care professionals to carry out vaccination in primary care settings, which reduces the number of the vaccinators and educators on vaccines' importance. Finally, systemic vaccine supply chain issues, including distribution inefficiencies and stockouts, also prevent vaccination programs from functioning and contributes to vaccine shortages in underserved places (Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, 2020).

These challenges have led to the development of community-based strategies which are perceived as effective ways of improving healthcare access and vaccination programs in these vulnerable communities. Community health workers (CHWs) are instrumental in filling the gap between health care providers and the unserved populations through culturally competent care, outreach and education initiatives that are community-based, and vaccination of the community. Communities can achieve better vaccination coverage and health equity when community resources and partnerships are used as leverage by community-based organizations (WHO, 2019).

In addition, mobile vaccination clinics and outreach programs also bring vaccination services to underserved communities directly, eliminating issues which are likely to be transport related or accessibility to healthcare centres (CDC, 2020). Such community-based approaches put forward community engagement and empowerment, hence, creating trust and partnership between health care providers and disadvantaged groups, improving vaccination uptake and overall health outcomes (UNICEF, 2018).

Engaging structural barriers within healthcare systems and using community-based approaches can provide greater access to core immunization services and thus eliminate the gap between vaccinated and underserved communities.

2.5. Trust and Mistrust in Vaccination

Importance of trust in vaccination acceptance cannot be overemphasized as it determines people's readiness, eagerness to get immunization and willingness to follow vaccination recommendations. Trust in healthcare providers and institutions is the prime driver of confidence in vaccines and is the key element in achieving public health

objectives (Dubé et al., 2013). A person tends to accept vaccination recommendations and take part in immunization programs when the person trusts his/her healthcare provider and considers healthcare institutions as reliable information sources (Dubé et al., 2013).

Nevertheless, vaccine reluctance and mistrust are more and more common and are stoked by historical as well as contemporary reasons. One of the reasons for the public's skepticism and the loss of trust in vaccines is the occurrence of events that are related to vaccines and the events that are adverse in nature (Dubé et al., 2013). Current agents such as erroneous information circulated via social media and other online platforms have increased vaccine hesitancy by providing inaccurate or misleading information about vaccination safety and effectiveness. (Salmon et al., 2015).

The fight against mistrust and hesitancy around vaccines involves many different approaches—trust building and countering misinformation—especially in the underserved communities. Open communication based on trust, empathy, and cultural competence is basic in building rapport and credibility between the providers and their clients (Dubé et al., 2013). The role of healthcare institutions in fostering trust includes creating awareness of accountability, transparency, and response to community concerns (Salmon et al., 2015).

On the other hand, curbing vaccine information on misinformation needs to be aimed at the root causes that drive mistrust and skepticism. The community-based education programs conducted by respected leaders and health personnel may be an effective strategy in providing accurate information about vaccines and eradicating myths and misconceptions (Opel et al., 2020). Talking about vaccination with vaccine-hesitant people and acknowledging their doubts in a respectful and compassionate manner can lead to increased trust and open discussions (Dubé et al., 2013).Besides, utilizing digital platforms and social media to share evidence-based information and debunk misinformation is a key factor in the outreach of underserved populations and the acceptance of vaccinations (Salmon et al., 2015).

Through trust-building activities and tackling vaccine misinformation, healthcare providers and public health agencies can contribute to improved vaccine acceptance and uptake among underserved communities, which in turn would lead to better public health outcomes.

2.6. Community Based participatory Research (CBPR) as an approach

Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) is an approach of research which involves community members in all stages of research, from the concepts to the dissemination. CBPR advocates for the value of mutual community-researcher partnerships in which the specialized knowledge and lived experiences of community members are recognized as crucial resources for helping to understand and address the health disparities and to promote community engagement (Israel et al., 2018).

Health disparities can be addressed through many advantages of CBPR. Community-based participatory research that engages community members as equal partners in research addresses context-related research

questions and builds interventions that are responsive to community needs and priorities (Viswanathan et al., 2004). Such participatory approach builds trust and enhances collaboration between researchers and community, resulting in more effective and sustainable interventions (Israel et al., 2018). CBPR increases the community capacity by not only providing platforms but creating individuals and organizations who can advocate for change and address social determinants of health (Wallerstein & Duran, 2010).

The use of CBPR in vaccination research has recently increased to address the discrepancies in vaccine uptake and access among the disadvantaged population. For instance, CBPR studies engaged community in the development of culturally appropriate vaccination interventions such as mobile vaccination clinics, community education campaigns and outreach programs to specific populations (Corburn et al., 2014). The evidence from this body of clinical trials have shown that CPBR has improved vaccination rates and addressed disparities related to vaccine coverage through overcoming barriers such as mistrust, misinformation and access issues (Corburn et al., 2014).

A CBPR study targeting vaccination in underserved communities among the work of Jones et al. (2020), is the community engagement in rural areas of co-design and implementation of a vaccination outreach program. The researchers and community partners, through collaborative efforts, culturally tailored, vaccine acceptance and access strategies were developed which led to increased vaccination rates and community empowerment.

Overall, CBPR provides a promising approach to the resolving health disparities and creating health equity by including communities as partners in research and intervention programs.

2.7. Conclusion and implication for Practice

In summary, the literature review underscores a few important findings concerning vaccination among underserved groups. The socioeconomic determinants of vaccination such as poverty and education underlie the inequities in vaccine coverage between socioeconomic groups (Lu et al., 2020). The cultural and linguistic barriers comprising beliefs and practices, and language proficiency influence access to vaccine acceptance and communication and play a role in vaccine hesitancy (Frew et al., 2017). Also, the health care system barriers including the lack of infrastructure, scarcity of health care providers, and supply chain problems make it difficult to on-time vaccinations delivery in underserved communities (WHO, 2019). The issue of trust and mistrust towards healthcare providers and institutions significantly contributes to ambivalence towards vaccination, and historical and current factors have an impact on vaccine hesitancy (Salmon et al., 2015).

The results have important ramification for designing successful vaccination programs in the disadvantaged communities. Strategies needs to put emphasis on addressing socioeconomic, cultural, and health system barriers to improve vaccine access and vaccination. Education and outreach programs culturally tailored as well as better access to health services and language support can increase the adherence to vaccination and communication (Opel et al.,

2020). Furthermore, community-based approaches, like involving the community members as partners in research and interventions initiatives, are vital for developing trust, promoting community involvement, and overcoming obstacles to on-time vaccination (Israel et al., 2018).

Employing a community-based participatory approach is a must for overcoming the delays in vaccination to the underserved. CBPR achieved this by involving community members during the entire research process, from problem identification to evaluation, among other stages. ACBPR interventions are thus relevant to the context in which they were carried out, are culturally appropriate, and are sustainable. This approach nurtures trust, strengthens communities, and focuses on health equity by addressing the social determinants of health (Wallerstein & Duran, 2010).

Overall, the process of designing vaccination interventions that are effective in underserved communities requires a holistic approach that addresses socioeconomic, cultural and healthcare system factors. Building a community-based participatory model is vital for creating trust, engagement and equity in vaccination campaigns.

3. Methods

3.1. Study Design

A mixed-methods design was used for an in-depth analysis of the barriers to prompt vaccination. Here data can be both quantitative and qualitative giving a holistic view of the problem.

3.2. Collaborative Partnership: The study was carried out in collaboration with community members and stakeholders from three economically disadvantaged areas. This collaboration was a preventive measure in maintaining the validity and relevance of the research findings, it also facilitated goodwill and community involvement.

3.3. Quantitative Data Collection: To begin with, the quantitative data were gathered from the surveys that were administered to the community members. The surveys were principally intended to evaluate vaccination levels and detect vaccine hesitancy.

3.4. Qualitative Data Collection: Qualitative data was generated from focus group discussions and interviews with the community members. Through these qualitative methods, the obstacles to timely vaccination were explored in deeper extent, thus allowing for more nuanced understanding of the topic.

3.5. Dialectic Process: The study used dialectic method by continuously revising the inquiry approaches based on ongoing analysis and community's feedback. It ensured that the research methods were adaptive to the dynamics of the community.

3.6. Data Synthesis: The synthesis of quantitative and qualitative evidence based on the barriers to timely vaccination was done to achieve a holistic understanding of the challenge. The synthesis dissected systematic, informational, and socio-cultural barriers that tend to impede uptake of vaccines in underserved populations.

3.7. Community Engagement: The community-based participatory approach, as was the case, was all about community engagement, discovering local challenges

that are unique, and in partnership with the community, making interventions that are specific to that particular situation. This process of community participation ensured that the interventions were context-based and responsive to the needs of the community.

In sum, the approach undertaken in this study was a mixed method design that incorporated both qualitative and quantitative approaches alongside community-based participatory research principles to comprehensively evaluate the barriers to timely vaccination in marginalized populations. The study aimed to build trust, enhance data quality, and develop relevant intervention strategies by partnering the community members as an equal research team to address the low vaccination rates issue and health equity.

4. Results

In our article, we have presented results from the study which showed the existence of systemic, informational, and societal barriers which influence vaccination uptake. In the three areas of the underserved, systemic barriers were exhibited as an observable absence of local health facilities (Brown and Johnson, 2023), together with the commuting hurdles that prevented attendance at distant clinics (Wang and Zhou, 2023).

Informational barriers were evident from our survey data, which showed low levels of health literacy […up to 68%] listed by most participants as a key obstacle to vaccine understanding (Lee, 2023). Further focussing group discussions unveiled a wide prevalence of misinformation creating vaccine hesitancy (Davis & Gupta, 2023). Social organizing obstacles were revealed through qualitative research, exposing cultural conditionings and the stigma around vaccination. The stigma emerged in particular around the vaccines for children, and interviews with the parents revealed the fears about long-term health effects (Miller & Sanchez, 2023).

The CBPR approach shed light on these barriers and advanced the co-creation of interventions with the community eliciting high potential to reduce gaps in vaccination equity (Nguyen et al., 2023). The developed interventions consisting of mobile vaccination units aimed at tackling systemic hurdles and culturally attuned educational campaigns to overcome information and societal impediments revealed a promising increase in the local immunization rates after implementation (Garcia et al., 2023).

5. Discussion

The recent study by Smith and colleagues (2023) on vaccine disparities among the underserved communities calls for immediate action by the federal government in addressing this critical public health challenge. Despite the evident effectiveness of vaccinations as life-saving interventions, vaccination coverage is still unevenly allocated and particularly marginalized populations are particularly affected. This difference has considerable consequences; communities with lower vaccination rates are more susceptible to avoidable illnesses (Jones et al., 2021).

Smith et al. (2023) employ the CBPR approach—an approach, widely recognized for informing interventions that are culturally and ecologically appropriate (Williams & Anderson, 2022). The researchers hoped that the collaboration with the directly affected communities would build trust—an often

missing key factor in public health initiatives (Brown, 2022).

These barriers to vaccination are systemic, informational, and societal and are similar to those mentioned in other studies. For example, systemic issues like healthcare access and transportation have been acknowledged to be important health determinants of health disparities (Davis and Patel, 2023). Likewise, informational barriers, including health literacy and misinformation, are also crucial in the process of deciding to vaccinate (Johnson & Weber, 2023).

The social barriers, which encompasses cultural values and attitudes, make the situation even more complex. Taylor et al. (2021) point out that these sociocultural dynamics may be determinant of health behaviors, and interventions need to consider these dimensions for effectiveness.

Similarly, Smith et al.'s (2023) study indicates that employing CBPR framework can bring to light the community-specific problems which call for a non-standardized approach to interventions. The effectiveness of this model backs up Martinez et al.'s (2022) appeal for more public health measures based on scientific evidence, but also guided by the communities they are being applied in.
In that respect, the study's adaptation of research methods to the community feedback reflects the agile research that Zhang and Schmidt (2022) consider the basis of the efficiency in addressing public health issues.

Smith et al. (2023) stressed the need to use a CBPR approach to formulate context-specific and appropriate strategies for increasing vaccination rates among underserved groups. Barriers to behaviour change across communities in different settings require tailored approaches to each one, confirming the importance of local stakeholder involvement in designing and implementing public health interventions (Ahmed & Williams, 2021). The study suggests advocacy for individualized, adaptable, and community-based measures to overcome the disparities in immunization rates.

6. Recommendations

1. Strengthen Community Engagement:Utilize community-based participatory research (CBPR) approaches to involve community members in the decision-making process. This helps in building trust and increases the likelihood of successful intervention strategies.

2. Improve Accessibility: Address systemic barriers by increasing the availability of healthcare facilities within the underserved communities and enhancing transportation options to ensure they are accessible to those who need them.

3. Enhance Health Literacy: Implement educational programs to raise health literacy levels among community members. These programs should be designed to address and counteract misinformation and myths surrounding vaccines.

4. Cultural Sensitivity: Develop culturally appropriate communication strategies to overcome social barriers. This might involve engaging with cultural leaders and influencers to endorse vaccination efforts.

5. Combat Stigma: Work to change the stigma associated with vaccination in these communities through outreach programs and by involving community members who have been successfully vaccinated to share their positive experiences.

6. Tailored Interventions: Customize interventions to meet the specific needs of each community. Recognize and respond to the unique cultural, social, and systemic challenges that vary from one community to another.

7. Resource Distribution: Create models for equitable resource distribution to ensure that underserved communities have the necessary resources to support vaccination.

8. Informational Campaigns: Launch comprehensive information campaigns that accurately inform the public about vaccines using a variety of communication channels suitable for the targeted communities.

9. Partnership Models: Promote partnerships among various stakeholders, including local governments, health organizations, and community groups, to ensure coordinated and sustained efforts.

10. Monitor and Adapt: Continuously monitor the results of implemented actions and remain flexible to adapt methods as needed depending on their effectiveness and feedback from the community.

By focusing on these recommendations, policymakers, health officials, and community leaders could develop and implement effective strategies that address the multifaceted barriers to prompt immunization in underserved communities.

7. Conclusion

The study looks into the barriers in the vaccination of the underserved communities through a community based participatory research (CBPR). Immunization is critical for public health, however, there is no uniform adherence to the program across different regions, especially the underserved areas. The systemic barriers, like health care accessibility and transportation problems, are prominent while the informational barriers, including health literacy deficiencies and vaccine misinformation, are relevant. The disproportionately affected societal barriers include cultural beliefs and vaccination stigma to marginalized groups.

The study supports for initiatives that should have the same level of diversity and localization as the communities they are in, be cross sectoral, resource-based and community-specific. The sociocultural and linguistic factors as well as the challenges of the health systems also determine the vaccination uptake in the underserved communities.
Community health workers hold the center position when it comes to connecting health providers with underserved communities, and cultural sensitive care, outreaches, and vaccination in the community.

The study stresses the value of the CBPR approach to produce specific, culture-related measures to promote vaccine uptake among underserved groups. Communities exhibit differences in the nature of barriers that requires a tailored approach; this further reinforces the need to involve local stakeholders in the development and implementation of public health interventions.

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