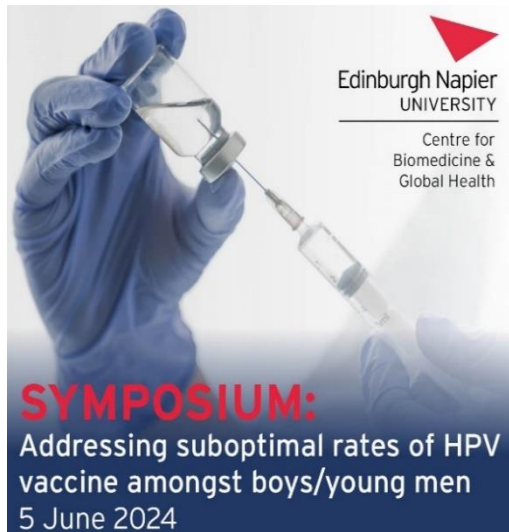


Vaccine Hesitancy Symposium: Addressing suboptimal uptake rates of the HPV Vaccine amongst boys/young men:



A Policy Briefing Report June 2024.

Summary

Hosted by the **Centre for Biomedicine and Global Health at Edinburgh Napier**, we held a half day knowledge exchange symposium to showcase past and current research on **vaccine hesitancy**. Delegates attended from the University sector, NHS Lothian Schools Vaccination, Public Health Scotland and MECOPP to hear key messages from four projects and engage in dialogue about these messages. We had wider interest from Government, other Universities, charity sectors for men's health, special interest groups in HPV.

Key Messages for Policy

To address gender health inequalities for the HPV vaccine, renewed public health communication is required that focuses on the *direct* and *indirect* benefits of HPV vaccination for boys/young men to move away from the 'girl vaccine' legacy. Evidence that men's health directly benefits from the HPV vaccine as a cancer-prevention vaccine in anal, penile and oral cancers is important to communicate. Indirectly, 'herd immunity' efforts are important to emphasise along with men's role in HPV transmission and the protection of women against cervical cancer.

Men with a (mild/moderate) learning disability experience discrimination in terms of sexual health and are capable of decision-making if enabled. Creative efforts to engage this group are important given that they are sexually active but have missed communication opportunities.

Inclusion of sexual minorities in the HPV vaccine programme is important through opportunistic health encounters but they experience stigma in disclosing their identities. Gender neutral vaccine programmes are important to reach both genders at school-level without such disclosure needed.

A novel STEAM project which used a creative peer to peer approach (films) amongst Irish teens, including boys from deprived communities, showed promise in supporting peer advocacy for the HPV vaccine to their younger classmates facing vaccination when scaffolded by scientists, educationalists and film-makers/design. The feasibility of this could be considered in wider schools and other cultural contexts.

Introduction

Vaccine hesitancy, delays or refusals to be vaccinated despite vaccine availability, is a global phenomenon and a top ten threat to global health (WHO, 2019). Vaccine hesitancy is complex and context dependent. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a global decline in vaccine uptake rates. Recent diseases outbreaks, for example for measles are reminders of the significance of vaccination. One vaccine, the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine, has also seen a global decline. The HPV vaccine plays a cancer-prevention role in cervical cancer for women but is also effective in preventing head and neck cancers, anal, penile cancers and genital warts affecting both women and men. Despite many countries now offering 'gender-neutral' HPV vaccination (vaccinating both girls and boys), there are global suboptimal HPV uptake rates for boys/young men. **Boys/men's role and HPV vaccination has tended to be overlooked.**

Local past and present research conducted at Edinburgh Napier University offers insights into the problem of vaccine hesitancy amongst boys/young men and how to engage with marginalised boys/young men in public health campaigns and messages.

Aim

To showcase four local research projects which offered behavioural and contextual insights into the problem of vaccine hesitancy amongst boys/young men for the HPV vaccine.

Symposium Themes: a collection of unique research projects on HPV vaccine hesitancy amongst boys/men including those from marginalised groups: young men with a learning disability; sexual minorities; boys from deprived socioeconomic backgrounds within different cultural contexts using **qualitative, creative and arts-based interdisciplinary approaches.**

Roundtable Discussions

These centred on:

Culture and masculinity and its transferability to other minority ethnic groups such as the Gypsy/Traveller community. A tailored approach was considered important for providing single-gendered spaces. The significance of community leaders advocating the vaccine was emphasised and intergenerational health. This had parallels with our previous Community Engagement Model (Carnegie et al. 2017). The 'girl' vaccine legacy was important to consider.

Learning disability and barriers for this group of young men who were not the main targets of the vaccine due to gender and perceived capability despite reporting being sexually active. Young men could be engaged in this topic and vaccination efforts should target this group and support their decision-making. Tailored and specific approaches to engage vulnerable groups were discussed.

Stigma and access to health services for sexual minority groups where disclosure of identity was problematic to access health.

Creative outputs by Irish teens in the STEAM project, facilitated advocating for HPV vaccination amongst their younger peers and could increase their own and peers' vaccine confidence. Films could be shown to other audiences. Staff education was emphasised in frontline delivery for the HPV vaccine.

Appendix Symposium talks Chaired by Professor Iain Atherton, Professor of Nursing and Data Science, School of Health and Social Care

Young men’s communication preferences for the HPV vaccine in a qualitative, cross-cultural analysis in Scotland, Spain and the United States: [Carol Gray Brunton](#), Elaine Carnegie, Janette Pow, Irina Todorova, Rocio Garcia-Retamero, Anne Whittaker. Funded by Edinburgh Napier University and British Council Researcher Travel Links.

“They did say that it’s something private and we’re not allowed to find out”: **Young men with learning disabilities disentangling the “truth” about the human papillomavirus and cancer prevention.** [Elaine Carnegie](#), [Carol Gray Brunton](#), [Catriona Kennedy](#), [Janette Pow](#), [Diane Willis](#) and [Anne Whittaker](#). Funded by The Carnegie Universities Trust Large Grant.

Locating HPV vaccination in the sexual health of GBMSM in Scotland: [Dr Lewis Clarke](#); Funded by ENU PhD Studentship, Supervisors [Dr Carol Gray Brunton](#), [Dr Janette Pow](#) and Professor Brian Williams.

How to engage Irish teens with HPV vaccination: HPV Education powered by STEAM. Authors: [Eva Malone](#), [Richard Firth](#), [Carol Gray Brunton](#), [Celine Healy](#), [Iain Macdonald](#), [Claire Kilty](#). Funded by Science Foundation Ireland.

Actions

To circulate the briefing report to delegates and interested stakeholders

To engage with partners in discussions about future research and evaluation/CPD/KE and education

Further Contacts

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