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COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy among unvaccinated individuals in a primary care setting, Pretoria.

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INTRODUCTION

The WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic in 2020, leading to lockdown in South Africa.

Vaccination remained the most effective method for preventing mortality and improving community protection against SARS-CoV-2 through herd immunity.

WHO defined vaccine hesitancy as the delay or refusal to receive a vaccine, despite its availability and accessibility.

The study aimed to explore the perceptions of the COVID-19 vaccine by unvaccinated individuals in a Tshwane community Health Centre.



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METHODOLOGY

DESIGN & SETTING:

An exploratory phenomenological study involving in-depth one-on-one interviews with 12 respondents from Temba community Health Centre(CHC) in Pretoria, South Africa.

SAMPLE SIZE:

Purposive sampling strategy was utilized until data saturation was reached.

DATA COLLECTION:

A research assistant conducted the one-on-one interviews using an interview guide.



Results

TABLE 1: Socio-demographic variables of participants.

Variables	Frequency (<i>n</i>)	Percentage (%)	Mean	s.d.	Min	Max
Age (years)			32.2	10.32	20	55
20–24	4	33.33	-	-	-	-
25–29	3	25.00	-	-	-	-
≥ 30	5	41.67	-	-	-	-
Sex						
Male	2	16.67	-	-	-	-
Female	10	83.33	-	-	-	-
Marital status						
Married	2	16.67	-	-	-	-
Single	10	83.33	-	-	-	-
Number of children						
None	2	16.67	-	-	-	-
One	6	50.00	-	-	-	-
≥ 2	4	33.33	-	-	-	-
Highest level of education						
Primary school	1	8.33	-	-	-	-
High school	3	25.00	-	-	-	-
Completed matric	5	41.67	-	-	-	-
Tertiary	2	16.66	-	-	-	-
Postgraduate	1	8.33	-	-	-	-
Employment status						
Employed	3	25.00	-	-	-	-
Unemployed	7	58.33	-	-	-	-
Student	2	16.67	-	-	-	-
Religious affiliation						
Non-Christian	1	8.33	-	-	-	-
Christianity	11	91.67	-	-	-	-
Chronic illness						
Yes	4	33.33	-	-	-	-
No	8	66.67	-	-	-	-

s.d., standard deviation; Min, minimum; Max, maximum.



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Results

TABLE 2: Themes and sub-themes.

Themes	Sub-themes
1. Perceptions of COVID-19 disease	1.1. Understanding of COVID-19 disease
2. Perceptions of COVID-19 vaccine	2.1. Understanding of COVID-19 vaccine 2.2. Views about the benefits of COVID-19 vaccine
3. Factors related to non-vaccination	3.1. Personal experiences 3.2. Health-related factors 3.3. Societal and political factors 3.4. Safety concerns
4. Information sources about the COVID-19 vaccine	-
5. Long-term decisions regarding vaccination	-

COVID-19, coronavirus disease 2019.



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Theme 1

Most participants had a clear understanding of COVID-19 disease, with only two participants who were doubtful about its existence.

A participant stated: *“It’s like a dangerous flu. A very dangerous flu, you know? Yes, a dangerous flu, that if you get it, you know what? It’s going to kill you. If you happen to get that flu, you’d have to make sure that you get it treated quickly.”* (24 years old, female, high school, unemployed)

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Another participant stated: *“I feel like it’s a man-made disease”*. (24 years old, female, tertiary, employed).



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Theme 2

There was clear awareness of COVID-19 disease among participants, but a very basic comprehension of the COVID-19 vaccine.

One respondent: *“Yes, a vaccine is what was used to treat those who had COVID. They said it heals. And we all must get injected so that we shouldn’t get COVID.”*
(22 years old, female, high school, unemployed)

Another respondent: *“So they explained that they vaccinate you so that if you are infected from someone, it doesn’t really infect you like that, like it doesn’t come on as strong. But otherwise, it won’t do anything. But for those who aren’t vaccinated, when it comes, it comes all at once and very strong. And if you don’t get help quickly or come to the clinic, it’ll kill you.”* (24 years old, female, high school, unemployed)



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Theme 3

Four major factors influenced individuals' decisions not to be vaccinated:

- health-related factors
- safety concerns
- personal experience
- variety of social and political variables.

A participant: *“ According to me, there are no benefits because I didn't get vaccinated and I'm still here. There were those who got it and are no longer with us. So, for me, it's all the same.”* (24 years old, female, tertiary, unemployed).

Another Participant: *“We don't know what it is, and we don't know where it comes from. So just imagine me taking something and putting it in my body, and I don't even know what it is.”* (39 years old, female, matric, unemployed).



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Theme 4

Participants reported obtaining information from various sources, such as:

- Traditional
- Social
- Authoritative
- Word- of-mouth sources

A participant 24-year-old female indicated that despite the information provided by health professionals at health facilities, she decided not to get vaccinated because of other people's opinions: *"They would tell us, but we wouldn't listen to them. We would only agree for that moment and then decide not to go when we're alone. Yes, we heard from people and that made us scared."* (24 years old, female, high school, unemployed)

Another Participant: *"Oh, honestly, my biggest source was the Internet. Like as a young person a lot was social media. Maybe clips that I would watch on YouTube or maybe the news sometimes, but a lot of information you get from social media."* (27 years old, male, postgraduate, unemployed)



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Theme 5

The interviews revealed three main responses regarding the COVID-19 vaccine:

- Those who would accept it
- Those who would not
- Those who were still unsure

A participant responded: *“Immediately”* (27 years old, male, postgraduate, unemployed)

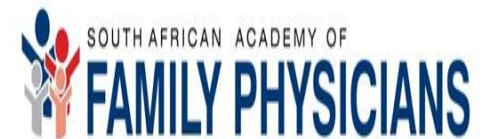
Another Responded: *“Yes, I would agree to get vaccinated”* (28 years old, male, primary, unemployed).

Other participants maintained their decision not to get vaccinated:

“I’m still standing with my no” (20 years old, female, matric, student); *“I don’t think it’s the best option to get vaccinated”* (39 years old, female, matric, unemployed).



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Conclusion & Recommendation

Vaccine hesitancy should be viewed as:

- A powerful concern from the community
- A key source of worry for the health authorities over any vaccine-related doubt

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A health authority-organised educational campaign that uses official channels to emphasise all pertinent vaccine information may raise public awareness and address vaccine hesitancy.



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