



**Review Article**

# Vaccine-hesitant at First but Got Vaccinated Later: The Lived Experiences of the Residents of a Barangay within Iloilo City, Philippines

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**ABSTRACT:** *Despite the spread of health information regarding the benefits of COVID-19 vaccines, there are still people who contradict this idea. This study sought to explore the point of view of vaccine-hesitant individuals who have changed perspectives regarding COVID-19 vaccination. The study also described the relevance and effectiveness of health information regarding the safety and benefits of the said vaccines. In this study, a phenomenological qualitative research design was used. Ten (10) vaccine-hesitant individuals who have changed perspective within a chosen barangay of Iloilo City were interviewed. The major themes that emerged from these interviews were that most of the participants were hesitant due to vaccine-related deaths and shortened clinical trials of the COVID-19 vaccine. The health information they gathered mainly came from social media, advice from health professionals, and testimonials from relatives and friends who were vaccinated, which made them change their perspective toward the COVID-19 vaccine. Considering the gathered data from interviews, health information has a significance on the change of perspective of the participant regarding the COVID-19 vaccine.*

**KEYWORDS:** *COVID-19, Pandemic, Vaccine, Hesitancy, Health information, Phenomenology.*

## INTRODUCTION

As it stands, the Philippines is still under a health crisis that is greatly affecting the people's way of living and making significant losses to the country's economy. This health crisis, the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Concerning this, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), achieving herd immunity will serve as a combat against COVID-19 [1]. But the emergence of vaccine-hesitant individuals impedes the attainment of herd immunity. The Department of Health (DOH) started administering COVID-19 vaccines on March 29, 2021, which can be a reason why individuals were still hesitant to get vaccinated since the vaccines are still experimental [2]. According to DOH, despite the higher rates of COVID-19 cases this year, the fatality rates are lower and this is due to the active administration of the vaccines.

Despite the spread of health information regarding COVID-19 vaccines and the vast number of people who have been vaccinated, there are still people who contradict this idea. In line with this, according to CNN news vaccine hesitancy and misinformation, effectiveness prevents people from being vaccinated [3]. In line with this, according to Dr. Paul Offit, Director of the Vaccine Education Center at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, anti-vaxxers and vaccine-

hesitancy are not new in today's time for this has been going on for a long time. Health information is a way of disseminating awareness by providing information that promotes safety practices that could benefit individuals in society. This information is crucial, especially in this time of pandemic since it provides people with up-to-date news and information. However, there is an emergence of misinformation that leads to harmful interventions and a delay in seeking safety information.

Some factors could contribute to misinformation regarding COVID-19 vaccines. According to Dennis Thompson, a reporter from health day news, there are two major types of disinformation being promulgated about the coronavirus vaccines: First, Anecdotal "cause-and-effect" rumours that erroneously tie a person's untimely demise to the fact they recently got a COVID-19 vaccine. Second, "Big lie" conspiracy theories allege the vaccine can cause all manner of major side effects, from infertility to permanently altering your genetics. Lastly, the information found in different media platforms regarding COVID-19 vaccines may be one-sided which could influence one's perspective and can prevent the attainment of herd immunity (Kim, et al., 2021) [4]. This study will help to understand the problem of vaccine hesitancy despite all the health information presented on different media platforms. This study will also be useful to the different pharmaceuticals responsible for the manufacture of vaccines and of the different health authorities from DOH to WHO that these are the responses and the perspectives of the public towards the vaccine. In that, they will be able to address the circulating misinformation and correct the hearsay regarding the vaccine. Moreover, to serve as a basis for future research, the findings of this study can be used as reference data for the development of better response plans specifically in terms of the vaccination program if another pandemic arises.

This study sought to explore the point of view of vaccine-hesitant individuals who have changed perspectives regarding COVID-19 vaccination and determine the relevance and effectiveness of health information regarding the safety and benefits of the said vaccines. Specifically, the study will (1) explore the knowledge and perception of vaccine-hesitant individuals towards COVID-19 vaccines, and identify underlying reasons for vaccine-hesitant individuals and the factors that made them hesitant at first; and (2) assess if and how health information influences the vaccine-hesitant individuals with their decision in getting vaccinated.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study utilized a qualitative research design specifically a Phenomenological Research design, which emphasizes the unique own experiences of research participants. The phenomenological method focuses on studying the phenomena that have impacted an individual. According to Hycner (1999, p. 156) [5], "the phenomenon dictates the method (not vice-versa) including even the type of participants. This study was conducted at a chosen barangay within Iloilo City. The researchers have gathered and selected 10 interviewees who were vaccine-hesitant individuals that have changed their perspective regarding COVID-19 vaccinations. The sampling technique for this study utilized a purposive sampling method. The researchers directly identified the individuals with suitable profiles for the study and invited them to participate. Moreover, the criteria for the selection of the participants of this study are the following; (1) Filipino citizen, (2) A resident of a chosen barangay in Iloilo city, (3) The participant must be at the age of 18 or above, (4) Must fall under vaccine-hesitant individuals who have changed perspective, and (5) Specific only on the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccines. Therefore, vulnerable participants are not included in this study since participants involved are sane and of legal age that can provide full consent to participate in the study.

This type of research study was collated through personal interviews. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the researchers conducted this interview either in an online setup or face-

to-face interview depending on the participant's request. First, an ethical clearance is required to signify that the ethical considerations of this study have been approved by a university Ethics Review Committee. Preliminary visits were conducted to assess and know if there were any potential participants in the area. Lastly, the briefing of participants was done before the actual interview to ensure that they are available on the scheduled date and time. This study utilized a qualitative type of research specifically in a phenomenological approach, and the data were collected either through online or face-to-face interviews. Moreover, to avoid a breach of confidentiality, the researchers must ask the participants if they will allow their names to be recognized during the presentation of the study. Listed below are the prepared questions that were related to the objectives provided in this study:

1. Can you please share your knowledge and perception about the COVID-19 vaccine?
2. Why were you hesitant to be vaccinated at first?
3. What made you change your mind to get vaccinated?
4. Have you been informed about COVID-19 vaccines? Where do you get this health information?
5. How did the health information influence your decision to be vaccinated?

This study utilized a qualitative research design specifically in a phenomenological theory approach. The data were gathered through a series of individual interviews. However, the current situation would affect the information gathering since the country was still amid a pandemic. The interview process can vary depending on the participant's convenience. Therefore, the data were collected either through online interviews through Google Meet and Zoom or face-to-face interviews. To ensure the validity and reliability of results the researchers performed the pilot study testing, to identify possible factors that may impede the interview process and provided solutions to hasten the conduct of the study. Also, it allowed researchers to identify if there were residents in the barangay who were willing to partake in the research study. Certain factors need to be included in the final questionnaire. A data management plan and a certificate to conduct approved by a university Ethics Review Committee were prepared. A scoring system/research-made grading that utilized a qualitative type of research that included concepts, perspectives, opinions, or personal experiences was also provided.

The phases of data collection included: (a) determination of participants in chosen barangay in Iloilo City; (b) securing consent forms from chosen barangay and participants; (c) formulation of Instruments; (d) acquiring materials needed for data collection such as recorder and laptop; (e) data collection or the interview process. This study used electronic data processing such as Microsoft Word to transcribe the recorded interview. The data was edited and examined by diligently checking for errors to identify technical omissions, check legibility, and clarify logically and conceptually inconsistent responses. This process allows the researchers to guarantee that data are accurate, consistent with the intent of the questionnaire, free of bias, and complete. When the data was collected, edited, and processed, the data are now ready for in-depth analysis. This study utilized the information gathered from the interview for data analysis. The data collected consisted of viewpoints and assertions which cannot be analyzed using statistical methods and processed using the phenomenological analysis introduced by Hycner, where the data underwent a series of procedures that helped the researchers establish a phenomenon of the study.

To further discuss the analysis of the data gathered, the following methods were done: (a) Transcription. The researcher transcribed the interview and this included the literal statements and as much as possible nothing significant non-verbal and paralinguistic communications. (b) Bracketing and phenomenological reduction. The researcher listened repeatedly to the audio

recording of each interview and became familiar with the words of the interviewee/ informant to develop a holistic sense. The information was bracketed according to the researcher's meanings and interpretations. (c) Listening to the interview for a sense of the whole. The researcher got a sense of the whole interview. (d) Delineating units of meaning. The researcher made a substantial amount of judgment calls while consciously bracketing her/his presuppositions to avoid inappropriate subjective judgments. (e) Delineating units of meaning relevant to the research question. The researcher addressed the research question to the units of general meaning to determine whether what the participant has said responds to and illuminates the research question. (f) Training independent judges to verify the units of relevant meaning. The researchers independently carried out the above procedures to verify the present findings. (g) Eliminating redundancies. The researcher looked over the list of units of relevant meaning and eliminated those which are redundant to others previously listed. (h) Clustering of units of meaning to form themes. The researchers determined if any of the units of relevant meaning naturally cluster together whether there seemed to be some common theme or essence that unites several discrete units of relevant meaning. (i) Determining themes from clusters of meaning. The researcher interrogated all the clusters of meaning to determine if there are one or more central themes. (j) Writing a summary for each interview. The researcher goes back to the interview transcription and writes up a summary of the interview. (k) Return to the participant with the summary and themes: Conduct a second interview. The researcher returns to the research participant with the written summary and themes and engages in a dialogue with this person concerning what the researcher has found so far. (l) Modifying themes and summary. The researchers need to look at all the data as a whole and modify or add themes as necessary. (m) Extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews. The researcher looked for the themes common to most or all of the interviews as well as individual variations. (n) Contextualization of themes. The researcher placed the themes back within the overall contexts or horizons from which these themes emerged. (o) Making a composite summary. The researcher wrote up a composite summary of all the interviews which would accurately capture the essence of the phenomenon being investigated.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

### *Knowledge about COVID-19 vaccine Results*

The results regarding the knowledge of the respondents about the COVID-19 vaccine revealed that the majority of the responses of participants were aware of the negative side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine such as fever, tiredness, headache, muscle ache, chills, and pain at the site of injection. The said side effects varied among the respondents, some of them experience mild to moderate side effects after being vaccinated. All of the respondents were knowledgeable that the COVID-19 vaccine is newly released and discovered, and has shorter clinical trials than other vaccines, leading to numerous clinical errors. Because of this, they think it is the cause of the reported deaths of other vaccinated persons. Only a few of the respondents are knowledgeable of the development of immunity towards the COVID-19 virus after administering the COVID-19 vaccine. A particular respondent's knowledge about the COVID-19 vaccine was that the vaccine is made of bacteria and was not good to administer to the body since our body already has countless bacteria.

In regards to the responses of the respondents about their knowledge regarding the COVID-19 vaccine, only a few of the respondents were quite knowledgeable of the vaccine even though almost all of the social media platforms are disseminating information about the COVID-19 vaccine. The respondents still lack important knowledge that could help them truly understand the purpose of vaccination and this could lead them to believe conspiracy theories.

### *Reasons of Hesitancy*

The participants responded with different perceptions regarding their reasons for what made them hesitant about getting the COVID-19 vaccine. One of the participants responded that she was hesitant due to her child with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) since ASD children could not vocalize their feelings as well as the side effects of the said vaccine. Some participants answered that they are hesitant due to what they have heard from other people that COVID-19 vaccines came from viruses that caused negative effects on the body. Moreover, other participants are hesitant because the COVID-19 virus is a recently discovered virus which made them perceive that the COVID-19 vaccine has shorter clinical trials, unlike other vaccines that took years to develop. In addition, some of the participants were hesitant to be vaccinated due to the emergence of conspiracy theories regarding the vaccine, one of which is the thought of being infertile or becoming a zombie upon receiving the said vaccine. The majority of the participants are hesitant at first to get vaccinated due to the increased rate of COVID-19 vaccine-related deaths which made them believe that the said vaccine brought harm rather than good.

Regarding health information dissemination, the different perspective of the participants regarding their hesitancy in getting vaccinated against COVID-19 has a great contribution to determining its effectiveness. Some of the participants showed a reasonable stand for being hesitant about getting vaccinated. However, the majority of the participants' perceptions toward the COVID-19 vaccine showed inadequate information which might have come from unreliable sources. Concerning this, the findings of this study regarding conspiracy theories agree with the results of an existing study on 'COVID-19 vaccination hesitancy, misinformation and conspiracy theories on social media: A content analysis of Twitter data'. It was found that the predominant reason for the individual's hesitancy towards COVID-19 vaccination was due to the emergence of misleading statements that immunization against coronavirus was unnecessary as the survival rate is high. In addition, the second most prevalent theme to emerge was tweeting constituting a safety and effectiveness-related concerns regarding the side effects of a potential vaccine developed at an unprecedented speed (Nuzhath, et al., 2020) [7]. Moreover, the emergence of conspiracy theories (Ginossar, et al., 2022) [6] found in different media platforms serves as a public health threat of health care providers' nonaction in providing pro-vaccine and scientific information about the vaccine on social media leading to vaccine hesitancy (Hernandez, et al., 2021)[8].

### *Reasons for the Change of Perspective*

The ten (10) participants have different responses on why they have decided to get vaccinated instead. Some participants have responded that the latest bulletins regarding the benefits of the COVID-19 vaccine made them change their minds. Some changed their decision as per the advice of their relatives and friends from the medical field. In addition, they have mentioned about the influence of other people's insights regarding the said vaccine made them change their perspective. But among all the responses, the most common response of the participants on why they have changed their decision of getting the COVID-19 vaccine is for their protection against the COVID-19 virus and the safety of other people around them. In connection with this, the majority of the participants have mentioned having been vaccinated with the COVID-19 vaccine as a requirement for work, to buy necessities, and for traveling within or outside the country.

Regarding the effectiveness of health information towards the participant's change of perspective, some participants have responded that the reason why they have decided to get vaccinated is because of the latest bulletins regarding the COVID-19 vaccine. Even though a minority of the participants have responded to health information as their reason why they have

decided to get vaccinated, this shows the relevance of health information in pursuing an individual regarding their take towards the said vaccine. Concerning these findings, there are no existing research studies that pertain to the reasons for the change of perspective of individuals who were once considered vaccine-hesitant.

### *Sources of Health Information*

The majority response of the participants on where they obtain health information regarding the COVID-19 vaccine is mostly from postings they find on social media platforms, specifically Facebook. Postings that vary from non-credible to credible ones. There was even one respondent who mentioned getting information from videos on TikTok. Also, frequently mentioned as sources of health information are the experiences and insights of their relatives and friends who already got vaccinated. Moreover, some of the respondents asked for advice from relatives and friends who were either doctors, nurses, or med techs. Furthermore, a few followed for the latest news and bulletins from WHO and DOH. There were also two or three whose staple sources are from news, health-related programs, and commentaries broadcasted on television and local radio stations.

Concerning vaccine hesitancy, because of misinformation that is spreading like wildfire in social media, which is the primary source of health information for most of the respondents, their knowledge and perspective regarding the truth about the COVID-19 vaccine are filtered with misleading and out-of-context information. Moreover, the Philippine News Agency reported that the Department of Health in a press release stated that, “vaccine misinformation hurts efforts to overcome the pandemic”. Indeed, the circulating misinformation regarding the COVID-19 vaccine did not just slow down the country’s vaccination program, but also lead to further lockdowns and infection because people had hesitancies brought upon by lies and clouts. In addition, a study shows that social media platforms contribute a major influence on misinformation and hesitancy towards the COVID-19 vaccine (Ginossar, et al., 2022). Therefore, this information supports the idea of social media as the primary source of health information for the participants of this study.

### *Influence of Health information on the change of perspective*

After some time of processing the health information, they heard and read, the majority came up with the realization that aside from the short-term side effects that they all are worried about, getting vaccinated will strengthen one's immune system to fight off COVID-19 virus and lessen its effect once contracted. Also, the majority weighed that there are more advantages (benefits) than disadvantages when getting vaccinated. Some found out that even though the COVID-19 vaccine was short in clinical trials, the vaccine is indeed effective. Moreover, one mentioned that since his source of health information is Facebook where he sees many of his friends posting about getting vaccinated, he decided to just join in with the trend. As time went by and the respondents began to find the truth regarding the COVID-19 vaccine, their hesitancy was slowly overcome by credible health information that opened their minds to what is true and not regarding the COVID-19 vaccine. That there are more advantages (benefits) than disadvantages when getting vaccinated. This, study shows that health information found on different media platforms affects an individual’s perception regarding vaccination (Meppelink, et al., 2019) [9]. This information coincides with the findings of this study since the majority of the participants came up with the realization that the vaccine offers more benefits than disadvantages.

### *Main Phenomenon*

The majority of the participants were hesitant to be administered with COVID-19 vaccine due to the vaccine-related deaths that were reported and the negative side effects that it poses. In

addition, its shortened clinical trials worried the majority if it is safe to use and truly effective. After some time of processing the health information they heard and read from social media, the advice they got from health professionals, and the testimonials from relatives and friends who already got vaccinated, the advantages (benefits) weighed in more than the disadvantages. Realize that they will not only be protecting themselves against the COVID-19 virus once they get vaccinated, but it will also ensure the safety of those that are around them. Thus, based on the data collated from the interviews, health information has a significance on the participant's change of perspective in getting vaccinated.

## **SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### *Summary*

Based on the presented findings, this study shows that the knowledge of the participants about COVID-19 vaccination greatly affects their hesitancy towards it. As to what is mentioned above, the majority of the participants were hesitant to get vaccinated due to vaccine-related deaths, negative side effects it poses, shortened clinical trials, and the emergence of conspiracy theories on different media platforms. These collated findings show that vaccine-related information disseminated on different media platforms has a major impact on people's perception regarding vaccination. Therefore, this study shows that health information regarding the COVID-19 vaccine poses both a positive and negative effect on the perspective of individuals since the major source of health information of the participants are from social media platforms and the spread of conspiracy theories and negative hearsay about the said vaccine in these platforms could lead to misinformation resulting in vaccine-hesitancy preventing the attainment of herd immunity. The findings will help to understand the problem of vaccine hesitancy despite all the health information presented on different media platforms. Also, the results may be utilized as a basis to address the circulating misinformation, correct the hearsay regarding the vaccine, and development of better pandemic response plans.

### *Implications*

The findings of this study can be used to describe the cause of vaccine hesitancy amidst the continuous persuasion of health professionals and the government. Moreover, this research can serve as a basis for making effective information dissemination of health-related facts. Results suggested that effective information dissemination had an impact on the decision-making of the participants. The efforts of their local officials, and health professionals, and the persuasion and recommendations of the government had a significant effect on their decision to be vaccinated.

### *Limitations*

The findings of this study cannot be generalized to other populations for various reasons. These findings cannot be applied to all the vaccine-hesitant residents of a barangay within Iloilo City. It is partly due to the limited area of the research and the fact that qualitative results cannot be generalized. As a result, the data gathered in this study could be interpreted in various ways and would lead to the development of different themes and findings.

### *Recommendations*

It is recommended to improve how health information is being disseminated since results show that some are still not well informed about the facts regarding the significance and benefits of the COVID-19 vaccine. There is a need to make a study focusing on the conspiracy theories and negative hearsay regarding the COVID-19 vaccine and provide a counterclaim supported by scientific facts to resolve the issue. It is also needed that the government draft laws regarding the regulation of information circulating the different social media platforms to prevent the

spread of false information limited not only to the information regarding COVID-19 vaccines but to other issues as well. Medical professionals should enhance a strategy to combat mounting threats of vaccine misinformation and hesitancy on different social media platforms.

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